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# The Condensed Lam Rim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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First we can practise some meditation. Sit in a relaxed and comfortable, good meditation posture. Then, on the basis of sitting in a good and relaxed meditation posture, the mind also needs to be put into a good space. We practise meditation in order to reduce conceptual thoughts. It is important that one reduces conceptual thoughts because the more that one reduces conceptual thoughts the clearer and more stable the mind will become. Therefore, for that purpose, we can practise some meditation.

Withdraw your mind from conceptual thoughts that distract the mind towards external objects and place the mind inwards, completely, 100%. Then, when you have focused the mind internally in such a way, place the mind single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. You absorb the mind into the breathing. We can meditate in that manner for a few minutes. *Pause for meditation.*

It's good if you all practise a little bit of meditation. It's good to build up positive and good mental patterns and then not to lose them. If one doesn't harness one's mind somewhat then it is very difficult not to lose the qualities that one has. One has to engage in the practices of listening and contemplation and then harness one's mind.

It is important that one has positive and wholesome inner qualities that can act as tools for one's happiness and wellbeing. What happens internally is so much more important in one's life than what happens externally. For example, internally we decide who is a friend, who is an enemy, who is a stranger. There are certain people in our lives that are definitely our friend, such as our parents, but apart from those, it's really basically decided by our mind. So one should look after one's mind and develop positive and wholesome mental states that facilitate having a happy and relaxed life.

The significance of one's own internal mental state becomes obvious when one is living alone. Why is it that one cannot be happy even though one is living alone? There's no one who is causing problems for one so that proves that there's something internally missing. There's a positive internal influence missing that facilitates one being happy. If one is staying alone there's no external person that provides external happiness but, there's also no external person that provides external problems. Why one can't stay happy at such a time is really because of some internal deficiency. There's something missing inside through which one can be happy.

In order to develop internal qualities we engage in the practice of listening. Without listening one cannot develop internal qualities. In order to develop internal

qualities we first have to listen to teachings about those qualities so we can then develop them.

Last time we talked about the benefits of listening and one benefit of listening was that the qualities that one develops through listening cannot be taken away by another person. They will not be the object of some thief. Those qualities that one develops through listening will remain with one continuously. Regardless of whether one looks at it from a Dharma point of view or whether one looks at it from a worldly point of view, one needs to protect the qualities that one possesses. If one protects the qualities that one possesses then one will receive those benefits from listening that are mentioned.

The practice of listening is the supreme weapon that overcomes the darkness of ignorance. This is really correct. We overcome the ignorance that we have through listening to new information. In order to overcome the ignorance that we have we need to acquire new information. We need to listen to new information. One's practice of listening is one's best friend.

First one listens to teachings and one will understand what one has to practise and what one has to abandon; what has to be developed and what has to be abandoned. Then one can make a plan of how to go about that practice of developing and abandoning through one's understanding. Listening helps one to develop one's internal wisdom. One develops the internal wisdom of understanding of what is right and what is wrong. Having done this one doesn't have to ask others, 'How should one do this?' or 'How does this have to be done?'. One has oneself developed the internal wisdom already. If one still has to ask others then it is a sign that the internal method that arises from listening hasn't been developed yet.

Through listening one can educate oneself and then it is not necessary anymore to be educated by others; to be trained by others. By engaging in the practice of listening one can educate and train oneself. One can learn for oneself. Without the practice of listening one will not be able to understand the important points of what has to be purified, what has to be developed and so forth. Through the practice of listening, one can develop one's internal understanding. So, out of the different types of friends and close associates that one might have, the practise of listening is the real friend.

Listening isn't like one's friends and relatives. Friends and relatives want to be close to us as long as our situation is good and we are well of. However, once our situation declines and we become poor they don't want to be seen with us anymore.

They say, 'I'm really ashamed to be seen with that person. I don't want to be seen with that person'. The internal relative of listening won't do that. Listening is an internal friend that will not turn away when one's situation changes.

The internal friend of listening is a real friend that will stand by one, regardless of whether one's situation is good or bad, and will help one in difficult situations such

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as at the time of sickness or at the time of death. By having a good understanding, even though the body is physically sick, one can mentally remain happy and through one's Dharma knowledge one can experience a peaceful and happy death. The internal friend of listening will stand by one regardless of one's external situation. External friends and relatives will change their mood depending upon one's own condition. There will be times when they will turn away from one and not want to talk to one. But the internal friend of listening will never turn away from us. Of an external friend and an internal friend, the internal friend is better and more reliable. The internal friend, the qualities of listening, they're qualities that one has developed.

Many people find it very beneficial when they think in terms of an internal friend. When they hear this type of teaching they find it very beneficial for their own mind. They say, 'That is really a very good concept; the concept of an internal friend'.

Listening is also the best medicine against the mental afflictions. It is also the best method for overcoming the negativities of body, speech and mind. Listening is one's best Dharma friend. The qualities of listening have the greatest renown. Of the different types of courageous ones, the qualities of listening are the most courageous ones. By having the qualities of listening one will develop courage. One won't, for example, be afraid of the lord of death. Out of external dangers and the internal danger of non-virtue, the internal danger of non-virtue is actually much more frightening than external dangers. The internal danger of non-virtue is what one should actually be really afraid of. With the practice of listening one can also counteract the mental afflictions.

The qualities of listening are the best type of foundation because they are inexhaustible. External qualities become exhausted when we use them. The internal qualities of listening are different. The more one uses them the more they develop. Some internal qualities are not used up but actually increase through usage.

Through the practice of listening one can listen to the eloquent words of the superior beings. The superior beings give many eloquent teachings that one can access through the practice of listening. Someone who possesses the qualities of listening will rejoice when they receive a detailed and proficient teaching while someone who doesn't possess the quality of listening, usually gets upset when they receive such a teaching. Even though there are a few more lines regarding the benefits maybe that's enough. So do you have some questions?

*Question: How does listening help us at the time of death?*

We're not saying that one attains eternal life through listening. We don't say that one doesn't have to die because of listening. But, at the very least, listening will lessen our worries at the time of death. If we are physically sick and then we mentally worry we just add the mental suffering to the physical suffering. Through the practise of listening one will, at the very least, be able to have less worries at the time of death. Ideally what one learns through listening is translated into practise. By

translating what one has understood through listening into practise one can then attain realisations. When the time of death has arrived for such a person, they are actually happy and joyful. Because of the attainment of their practice death is, for them, a very joyful occasion. At a medium level one will be able to die without regrets.

Through the understanding that one gains from the practice of listening one can then also lessen the three afflictions; ignorance, attachment and anger. Through meditation one's mind becomes habituated to states that are free from attachment, anger and ignorance. So through meditation one can lessen those three mental afflictions and make the mind more familiar with states that are free from those mental afflictions. In such a way then the mind becomes very clear and calm. Then, of course, when the mind is habituated to such a clear and calm state, free from those three afflictions, that also benefits one at the time of death. Then, at the time of death, one's mind will, of course, be more naturally free from the three types of afflictions.

It's very important that the mind does not fall under the control of attachment at the time of death. It is quite likely that one will experience different types of physical suffering at the time of death. Mental suffering will be induced at the time of death through attachment - by craving different objects of one's attachment. So it's important that one's mind doesn't fall under the control of attachment. At the time of death one becomes separated from friends and relatives, possessions and even one's body. It feels very isolated. One's thrown back totally towards oneself and becomes isolated from one's friends, possessions and even one's body. Ordinarily that is a very frightening experience. It is very good if one prepares oneself beforehand for that occasion. If one starts the preparation for death early, meditating on the mind free from attachment and making one's mind more familiar with states that are free from attachment, then, at the time of death, one will have an easier time. There's a need, a purpose for freeing the mind from attachment.

*Question: What is the difference between merit and virtue?*

In easy terms, merits refer to virtue. Regarding karma; there's karma that is meritorious and there's karma that is non-meritorious. We have virtuous karma, non-virtuous karma and neutral karma. The karma that is created through actions that are neither virtuous nor non-virtuous is called neutral karma. When, for example, you are sewing something that is neither virtuous nor non-virtuous. That's a neutral karma. But if, while you are sewing, you engage into harsh speech the you accumulate non-virtues karma. If you however, for example, recite the names of the Buddha while you are sewing then you accumulate verbal virtue at the time of sewing.

We have some control over physical and verbal karma. To control mental karma is very difficult because the different mental states arise very easily. It's more difficult. So, merit is karma that has a positive, happy result. Whether something is meritorious or not is defined by the result. If the result is happiness then it is

meritorious.

*Question: I always feel depressed when I am sick and put myself down. What to do about it?*

There's no need to be depressed and to feel bad. By reflecting upon the law of cause and effect and that the sickness is the result of non-virtuous karma you understand that it is actually a good thing that you experience the sickness. It purifies the non-virtuous karma. By thinking in such a way you will wish that the sickness even becomes stronger; that you get even sicker. That's the way real practitioners and Bodhisattvas feel when they experience some problem. They actually wish for, pray for, more problems in order to purify even more negative karma in order to be able to counteract self-cherishing even further. I think there's the experience that the more they have to give to the self-cherishing, to oppose the self-cherishing, the better.

One also prays that, by experiencing this sickness, may all that experience this same sickness be free from their sicknesses and may their sicknesses be placed upon me. But, by doing that practice, there is a danger that actually your sickness will be cured. *Laughter.* Our courage and strength of mind should increase in relation to the increasing of our problems. The greater our sickness, the greater our problems, the more our courage and strength of mind should increase. For us it's more the other way around. Normally the greater the problem the less confident one becomes. When one experiences great problems one should actually increase one's strength of mind and one's courage and take on those problems and practise the patience that willingly takes on sufferings; the forbearance that willingly takes on sufferings. In such a way one will arrive at a result. If one is not willing to take on any problems then one will not get any result.

*Question: Isn't it better to take medicine when we are sick?*

Those sicknesses, those sufferings that we can alleviate by taking some medicine are the more insignificant problems. But there are also practitioners who don't take any medicine when they become sick.

*Brief comment from same questioner, also inaudible.*

That's a little bit difficult to say. There are people that don't take medicine who later generate regret. First they don't take medicine because they want to transform their sickness into practice but then later they generate regret. Maybe their sickness increases and they develop some doubt, generate regret and think, 'Oh, I wish I would have taken the medicine'. Then there's another type of practitioner who thinks, 'Oh, I will not take any medicine, regardless of whether I get cured or not, and I won't have any regret'. But it is good to take medicine. For some practitioners becoming sick becomes an obstacle for their practice. Then it's better to take the medicine. But there are practitioners for whom it is actually conducive to have a sickness.

*Question: Given that we benefit spiritually from suffering, is it correct that we are pushing ignorance upon others if we wish for them to have samsaric happiness?*

Where's the comparison? Why would that be the same?

Worldly happiness isn't ignorance, is it? I mean if worldly happiness were ignorance then if you pray, 'May they have worldly happiness' then it would be like praying 'May they have more ignorance'. But worldly happiness isn't ignorance. To wish others to have worldly happiness is a good thing. Everyone should have worldly happiness. So to have this wish, to make this prayer, 'May others have worldly happiness', is a virtuous and meritorious thought. For example thinking, praying, 'Just as I, myself, am experiencing this happiness may all others also experience that happiness', is a very good thought to have.

*Questioner continues. Is it correct to say then that a person can benefit from one's suffering. I am just trying to make sense of that point. How do you construe that? Does it mean that a person receives benefits or disadvantages from having that sort of suffering depending on the way they interpret their circumstances? Because we can obviously benefit from suffering or we can be disadvantaged by suffering. It depends upon the individual.*

I assumed the question that you asked was whether worldly happiness is beneficial for people. Of course, worldly happiness is beneficial for people. When we are always complaining, 'I'm unhappy and I always have only suffering, and I'm lacking happiness', the happiness which we are referring to normally is worldly happiness.

*Questioner continues. In the Lam Rim, it does specifically say that the renunciate has abandoned the wish for worldly happiness.*

No, someone who has renunciation doesn't have attachment for worldly happiness but they don't say that worldly happiness is bad. I say happiness is good. The attachment to that happiness is bad. When you experience worldly happiness that experience of worldly happiness becomes tainted by attachment. We experience worldly happiness and we then generate attachment and the attachment is increased through the experience of the worldly happiness. Then, through the attachment, we are unable to actually enjoy the worldly happiness. The attachment takes away the satisfaction that one could otherwise experience in one's mind. The fault is really with the attachment.

As was explained at the beginning, withdraw the mind from external objects, and the disturbing thoughts that distract the mind towards external objects, and place the mind internally and focus the mind 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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