
The Condensed Lam Rim

ཕྱག་འབྲུག་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga
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13 August 2003

We can meditate for a little while as usual, so please sit in a comfortable, upright position.

As well as sitting in a comfortable position, we also need to put the mind into a comfortable space. We need to be both physically and mentally comfortable. If we are physically uncomfortable, it is difficult to feel mentally comfortable. Thus, it is important that we make ourselves completely comfortable.

If we feel physically unwell, we tend to say, "I feel unwell"; if we feel mentally, we also tend to say, "I feel unwell". So, it is important to overcome the obscurations that prevent the attainment of physical and mental wellbeing.

When we look into it deeply, we will find that the cause of our mental discomfort and ill-health is karma. However, the conceptualising mind – different types of conceptual thoughts – is also responsible for this mental discomfort. We can see for ourselves that unsuitable thoughts make the mind unwell. It might not be so obvious if we have not yet investigated the mind, but once we look closely, it is obvious that unsuitable conceptual thoughts cause our mental discomfort. It is worthwhile, then, to try to prevent mind falling under the control of unsuitable thoughts and so experience inner peace – even if it is just for one minute.

On the basis of sitting comfortably and upright, we stop the mind from engaging with external objects; rather, we withdraw it within, focusing it totally internally. Then, from within this space, we place the mind single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. We will meditate in such a manner for a few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*)

It is important that we don't lose our courage in meditating. It is a common for practitioners to be able to put the mind into a peaceful space and experience a calm and peaceful meditation for a few minutes; however, sometimes, after they arise from their meditation, unsuitable quickly arise in the mind, and their peace of mind is again disturbed. In such a way, one can lose one's courage and feel depressed.

Here, it is important that we don't lose our courage, but just continue to practise. If we continue to meditate and continue to familiarise the mind with a state that is not under the control of unsuitable thoughts, that state [of mind] will become more natural to us.

Because of our inability to treat ourselves well, we can cause ourselves great mental harm. By not harnessing the mind properly and just letting it run freely, following whatever attractive object appears to it, we receive great

mental harm. If we just follow the seductive appearance of an object that appears to the mind, even though we may feel some temporary pleasure while we follow that appearance, later, when we are separated from the object and alone, and the mind is again thrown back on itself. At that time, one will feel empty, sad and unhappy.

This comes about because of not properly harnessing the mind. If we harnessed our mind properly, these problems would not come about.

Before we engage in any action, we must investigate whether it is suitable or not, and whether we are able to actually do the action properly or not. Here, we have to investigate and rely on our own wisdom. We have to generate the discriminating awareness that understands our own actions and the nature of our actions.

It is important that we treat ourselves well, because our mental state primarily determines whether or not we live a happy life. Of course, external conditions are also needed for happiness, but the primary cause for happiness is the mind. Therefore, we must take care to treat ourselves properly – before we engage in any action, we should analyse whether that action is suitable or not.

We may find ourselves in a situation where we may recognise the action to be unsuitable, yet we feel unable to stop the action and so fall under its control or power. This is something we must be careful about. It is important that we look after our body and mind well.

If we recognised a certain action or substance to be harmful to our physical health, we would say: "No, I won't do that", or "I won't take that substance". Likewise, we should develop the ability to refrain from actions that harm our mind. In fact, if we understood well the psychology of the mind and the ways in which it works, naturally we would refrain from actions that harm it.

To protect the mind, we need to meditate. Without meditation, it is not possible to protect the mind. Meditation means training the mind well, so that we are able to refrain from doing actions that we know will harm the mind. We should be able to act in accordance with our wisdom. We must develop the wisdom that understands what is harmful to the mind and what is beneficial. Then, we should train the mind to refrain from those actions that we recognise as harmful.

In our case, we encounter situations where we are unable to refrain from an action, even though we recognise it to be harmful to our mental wellbeing. This is because we do not have enough mental training.

3.1.3. The actual way of listening to the teachings

We reached the outline of the actual way of listening to the Lam Rim teachings. We arrived at the point about the six recognitions – the first of which is regarding oneself as a sick person. This is similar to what we were just talking about.

You might ask: "How am I supposed to regard myself as a sick person if I'm not sick?" Well, this recognition is from the point of view of our practice. Even in day-to-day terms, we talk about physical and mental illness. If we

are not physically and mentally ill, that's a different matter. But it is rare to find someone who is not mentally unwell – even though it is not hard to find someone who is physically healthy, it is very difficult to find someone who has no mental sickness.

The root of mental sickness is the ignorance that grasps at the self. Ultimately, without opposing the ignorance grasping at the self, one will not be able to be mentally healthy.

On a coarse level, without looking at it too deeply, the constant notion of 'I' or self, the constant thinking about the 'I', induces many unsuitable disturbing thoughts. If you think about it, doesn't it make the mind feel unwell the more you think in terms of 'I'? Isn't it true that the more self-grasping one has, the busier one's life becomes? Isn't it also true that the busier the person, the less opportunity he or she has for happiness?

We have the situation where people are unhappy when they are busy, but they are also unhappy when they have leisure. This is the nature of cyclic existence. We are unhappy if we are too busy, and we are unhappy if we don't have enough to do. This is a surreal situation! It is in the nature of samsara that, whatever one does, one is not happy. If one is busy, one is unhappy, but then one when one is not busy, one is also unhappy.

The idea of the first [of the six recognitions] – perceiving oneself as a sick person – is that, as long as one doesn't perceive oneself as a sick person, one will not engage in actions to cure the sickness. First, the sickness has to be recognised.

Wouldn't you say it is true that we all have the sickness of different afflictions, like anger, pride, competitiveness, jealousy, ignorance and attachment? And wouldn't you also say that a mind free from anger, attachment, jealousy, ignorance, pride and competitiveness is a peaceful and happy mind? These mental states make it impossible for us to be happy, even though we may be physically healthy and materially well-off.

Outer objects can harm us, but mental afflictions such as attachment can also harm us. There is no one who hasn't experienced the harm given to us by attachment. And some of you are probably in the process of actually experiencing that harm. How does that harm come about? It is because of separation from the object towards which one is attracted and to which one becomes attached. Separation from that attractive object then causes unhappiness within the mind. One should recognise this and apply the appropriate antidote, so that one's mind is not harmed by attachment.

When one experiences the suffering and harm given by attachment, one should recognise the attachment as a sickness. And, one should then recognise as the 'medicine' any meditation that is an antidote to attachment.

Likewise, anger causes mental harm when we encounter an object that we see as being unattractive and undesirable. Again, one should recognise the anger as a sickness, and apply the correct antidote, which we

recognise as medicine. The same with jealousy – whenever we see others' material fortune, mental qualities and so forth, we experience mental unhappiness. Why? Because of jealousy.

We have been afflicted with the mental disease of the delusions since beginningless time. They are the reason we are unable to experience happiness, even though we may be physically well and healthy. Because of the mental afflictions, we cannot be happy, whether we are walking, sitting, sleeping, or even eating and drinking delicious and tasty food and drink – still the mind feels unhappy, dissatisfied and empty.

The reason why we feel unhappy, empty and dissatisfied doing all these activities is because of the mental afflictions. That is what is meant when we say that one must recognise oneself as a sick person; one has the sickness of the mental afflictions – they are the sickness that one has to overcome with the medicine of the Dharma.

This is an important point to contemplate. For example, in relation to attachment, there is a great danger that one will receive harm by being attracted to a desirable object. If one is not careful at the outset and lets one's mind fall under the spell of attachment, there is a danger that one will engage in a lot of harmful actions and then experience a lot of suffering. However if, from the outset, one is apprehensive and wary about following the actions of attachment, this is beneficial.

If we know there is some type of external harm endangering our physical health, from the outset we will be careful and take care that our body isn't harmed so that we can remain physically healthy. However, if we adopt the attitude: "A little bit doesn't matter", our body will be harmed. It is the same with the mind. If, from the outset, we shun the attitude of "a little bit doesn't matter" but rather we take a cautious approach, then our mind will not be harmed.

I will stop here for tonight. Next time I will read a few lines from the *Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* [by Shantideva]. Do you have any questions?

Question: You mentioned applying antidotes to the mental afflictions – is this being covered next week?

Answer: Yes, that will come later. We have to go a bit further on in the source text to arrive at the section of the antidotes. The section of Lam Rim that explains how we circle in cyclic existence contains an explanation of the antidotes to the mental afflictions.

Question: Geshe-la, is there a difference between attachment and grief?

Answer: There is probably a slight difference. When the mind is sad and grieving, it is down. Attachment, on the other hand, arises from seeing an attractive object and becoming attached to that object. Was that explanation OK? Did that clarify it? (*Student responds: "I'll think about it."*)

Geshe-la: Sadness comes about because the mind is down. For example, when the sun is setting, it causes a certain

sadness to arise within the mind. But when the sun is rising, it uplifts the mind. If you follow the sun when it is setting, this causes a slight sadness to arise in the mind.

This is why sunrise and sunset are regarded as unsuitable times for doing single-pointed meditation – rather, you should stop the session. A slight disturbance is generated within the mind when the sun is setting, causing the mind to feel down and a little dark. When the sun is rising, this also disturbs the mind.

Question: In practising bodhicitta and the first perfection of generosity – when we practise generosity towards others, should we be mindful of not creating attachment in their minds? Should we try to control how generous we are in our practice of bodhicitta?

Answer: No, you do not limit your practice of generosity!

Apart from a few exceptions such as poisons and weapons, bodhisattvas will give everything that is asked of them. While they won't give poisons, weapons or their three robes if they are asked for them, they will give everything else. Bodhisattvas have to give everything, because they have already made a promise to give everything to others.

A bodhisattva king once gave his wife and children away! (*Laughter*) So, when a bodhisattva is asked for his or her partner, they will give that partner away! (*More laughter*).

Question: Geshe-la spoke about recognising the wrong thing then doing it anyway, and said it is due to a lack of mental training. If we have not done that mental training, can you offer an antidote in the meantime to help us refrain from doing the wrong thing at the moment we are about to do it?

Answer: The reason why you are unable to stop doing that action is because you don't have enough mental training. What else can one say? Do you think someone should beat you with stick or (*laughter*) tell you to lock yourself in a room?!

For some people, it helps if they remove themselves from the object so they can't see it. The reason for going to an isolated place [to do meditation retreats] is to remove one's mind from disturbing objects. Because of the lack of [disturbing] external conditions, the mind is calmer and more peaceful and one can more easily work with it.

Question: Would Geshe-la say that meditation was the antidote to attachment?

Answer: As we have already mentioned, the meditation on selflessness is an antidote to all the afflictions.

Of the different afflictions, attachment is the most harmful for single-pointed concentration. A practitioner who has attained calm abiding has almost no manifest attachment. There still might be some residual attachment, but through the attainment of calm abiding, manifest attachment is pacified.

Your question is quite a common one – many students have commented to me: "I meditate quite a lot, but my attachment hasn't diminished". If we look into deeply enough, we will see that we are not meditating properly –

this is why our meditation has not diminished attachment.

For some people, their mind is only half-focused on the object – the other half of the mind is distracted. However, if we don't slowly train our mind to be totally focused on the object, it will be difficult for our meditation to act as an antidote to attachment. It is necessary to train one's mind to be totally focused in a slow and leisurely manner, by starting out with short meditations.

As was explained at the beginning, stop the mind from being distracted towards external objects, withdraw it inside and from within that space, place the mind single-pointedly on the name mantra of the Buddha.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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