
The Condensed Lam Rim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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Please sit in a comfortable posture maintaining a fresh and clear state of mind.

In relation to what are called virtuous and non-virtuous karmas, Lama Tsong Khapa mentions in one of his works; “If the mind is kind and virtuous, then naturally the paths and the grounds one enters become virtuous too, but if the mind is negative then as a result whatever path and grounds one may enter, they will turn out to be negative as well. Therefore what we call positive or negative is entirely depended on the state of one’s mind”.

In the context of our daily life, a virtuous state of mind particularly relates to having a kind mind. The importance of having a kind mind is very relevant if we look into our every day life. Those who have a kind mind, are generous and loving towards others definitely will have a better wellbeing in their life. Friends and relatives and so forth will appreciate them more. Even in mundane activities, we find that having a kind mind is actually very beneficial. It is also extremely crucial to have a kind mind to engage in the spiritual practice of the Dharma.

If one investigated for oneself, without having to just rely on what is said in the teachings and what a teacher says, it would be quite clear what kind of frame of mind is more beneficial for oneself. We can look into how we lead our life and what kind of attitudes arises in our mind, during the course of a day. It is important to investigate and analyse what frame of mind brings me more anxiety, unease and frustration, and with what frame of mind does one feel at ease and more peaceful? If we analyse for ourselves and look into the states of mind that arise and the effect these have, it becomes quite clear from our own experience that having a kind mind leads to having more peace within one’s own mind.

Another essential point is that we spend most of our time investigating external matters. As a result of spending most of our time investigating external matters, we neglect looking into our own mind, which is essential. It would be worthwhile to one’s wellbeing if we were to focus more inwardly.

When we discuss having a kind mind in our everyday life, it comes down to having a loving attitude towards others, beginning with one’s own family. If we look into the consequences of having a loving attitude towards one’s dear ones within one’s family, whether it’s a large family with children, or whether you are living only with your partner, one can see that if one shows a loving attitude towards them it naturally brings about a harmonious feeling

within the family. If it is contrary to that, a situation where people are hostile towards each other, we can clearly see what kind of effect that brings. For example, if one member of a family becomes very upset and angry, what kind of effect would that have on the rest of the family members during that period of time? It is quite clear that as a consequence of even one member of the family becoming angry, the rest of the family members are not really comfortable. They don’t feel at ease.

For example, even in a well-to-do household that has all the usual commodities for relaxation, such as having a big TV and so forth, it will not help to bring a relaxed atmosphere when someone in the household is being very upset and angry. Even if you sit in front of the TV which is normally relaxing, it feels uncomfortable at that time. No matter what other kind of activities one may engage in the house, it does not feel really comfortable because of the tense feeling with someone being angry. That is a clear indication that external objects can not really be an ultimate source for providing inner happiness and peace. When there is a disturbance within one’s mind, or someone else’s mind, even if you have the normal external objects it does not really help. An external object such as a TV does not help to bring peace in one’s mind at that time, does it?

If it is clear that an external object such as a TV will not help to bring about peace in one’s mind in that crucial moment when everyone’s unhappy, then that is a clear indication that an external object does not really contribute to having real peace of mind. Comparatively it will be clear what is more important. Whether it is more important to spend one’s time and energy in accumulating external things and objects, or whether it is worthwhile to spend some more time to investigate inwardly, which means developing the mind to gain more calmness and peace in one’s own mind. It becomes clear what would be more important.

However, I’m not in any way implying that external objects are not important. Of course, to a certain degree, we do need external objects, in order to bring some benefit for oneself. Having useful objects that contribute to more comfortable life, does help to a certain degree. What is being implied is not to completely rely on external objects for one’s own inner peace.

If this is quite clear, then the conclusion is that we need to spend more time and energy developing our mind and specifically using our intelligence; some may say our ‘brain’. Whether we call it using our brain or our intelligence we need to combine our intelligence with a kind mind. While we develop our intelligence, so that intelligence or what we call our brain becomes a companion, it goes hand in hand with a kind mind. Not to develop more intelligence at the expense of neglecting the development of a kind mind, but rather to enhance and develop it together hand in hand.

We come to the question now, how do we develop our mind in order to increase kindness in our mind? Meditation, of course can help to do that. What

meditation means is basically familiarising our mind further in developing those qualities within one's mind. By seeing or understanding the importance of having a kind and peaceful mind one becomes keener to develop that through meditation. If meditation is considered to be a form of sitting down and training one's mind, then even when one comes out of that formal meditation one will be able to maintain what one has gained during the meditation. If we have been developing our mind to become more calm and peaceful and developing kindness in our mind during meditation then, after meditation we will be able to maintain it with mindfulness and introspection. We will be able to maintain the qualities we have developed during the meditation so that we can spread that good effect during meditation throughout our life outside of our meditation session. In that way we will find that slowly, slowly it becomes more and more natural to see the world with a kind mind.

Regarding the earlier example of how when one member of the family becomes upset and this causes everyone else to be unhappy. If that is an experience that one can relate to it becomes quite clear that one's own behaviour could have the same effect. If one was angry or frustrated it affects others around oneself. Conversely, if one has a calm and peaceful mind this has a naturally good effect on others around one. If it becomes clear to us that having anger in our mind, or harbouring angry thoughts and angry feelings in our selves, does not have a good effect on others, it becomes clear that we need to do something to overcome the anger. Therefore we can put an effort into meditating on the antidotes of anger. Developing the antidotes and meditating on the antidotes of anger becomes crucial for oneself. As we train our mind in developing patience, we would find that eventually it becomes easier to deal with anger. Even when anger does arise we'll be able to first of all notice it or identify it and then, as we identify it, it becomes easier not to be completely influenced by that angry state of mind, and thus be able to control the anger better. This would minimize the harm to others and ourselves. Of course, to overcome anger completely right away is not possible. That's extremely difficult. But by training our mind in this way, we would find that it does help to minimise anger and to control our mind.

As we reflect on the disadvantages of anger within oneself and others we notice for ourselves that when we are angry, we are not really happy for as long as our mind is in angry mode. During that time we feel uncomfortable, we feel grumpy and uneasy. We are really not settled, are we? When we clearly identify and notice that within ourselves, it should lead us into trying to develop the antidotes and overcoming anger so that we can become more peaceful and happier.

Furthermore, by noticing anger within ourselves, it would help us to understand others better when they are angry. Our natural tendency seems to be that when we see others becoming irritated and angry it makes us feel uncomfortable and we get angry with them. It has the effect that when you see someone

else who is angry you think, "Oh, they are such an angry person", and you are uncomfortable and unhappy about that. The process of accusing someone else of being very angry has actually upset oneself. Rather than helping one, it harms one by getting upset about someone else's anger. If we reflect more on how in the moments of anger or in the state of mind of anger, one is not happy but is uncomfortable and miserable it will then help us to understand how others may be feeling when they're angry. Rather than getting upset and angry ourselves when we see someone else is angry, we could develop an attitude of understanding and compassion. If we understand that because they are in an angry state of mind, they must be feeling unhappy and miserable, we should then try to generate some love and compassion towards them instead of being upset with them.

On the basis of these points, we can spend some time in meditation. Once again we sit in a comfortable, relaxed position. We bring our mind inward, not allowing our mind to be distracted with external objects. Our meditation is short. It is extremely important, for whatever duration one meditates, to keep our minds completely focused on the object of our meditation. If we do it half-heartedly, where our mind is half focused on the object but half distracted with whatever thoughts may arise in our mind or whatever external distractions, it becomes habitual for the mind to just take our meditation very lightly and half-heartedly. We will never be able to achieve what we call concentration. Therefore it is very important, even if our meditation is for a very short time, to keep our mind, as Geshe-la mentions, 100% focussed. We can spend a few moments now using the breath as an object of focus, focusing our mind 100% on our breath. *Pause for meditation.*

You can come out of your meditation, from your Samadhi.

4.2.2.1.2 The actual way to take the essence

4.2.2.1.2.1 Training the mind in the stages of the path of the small capable being

4.2.2.1.2.1.1 The actual way of training in the motivation common to the being of small capacity

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.2 Relying on the methods for achieving happiness in future lives

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.2.1 Developing the faith of conviction in karma and its effects.

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.2.1.1 Thinking about the Law of Cause and Effect in general

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.2.1.1.2 Reflecting on the individual divisions

We have earlier gone into the explanations of karma in general. Now we come to the particular divisions of karma. In the actual outline of the middle Lam Rim, which I think some of you have, it is a reflection on the effects of karma in general and then reflection on individual divisions of karma. This is subdivided into two:

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.2.1.1.2.1 The principle presentation of the ten karmic deeds

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.2.1.1.2.2 Resolving karma and its effects.

The text explained the characteristics of karma earlier. Having ascertained or understood the characteristics of karma in general it is extremely important to apply this understanding by practising and adopting what is virtuous and abandoning what is non-virtuous. That is extremely important. It is definitely the case that it is crucial for us to first of all identify what is considered as being non-virtuous karmas and then the opposite of that, which are virtuous karmas. First identify what is virtuous and non-virtuous and then we need to engage our body, speech and mind in what is virtuous and avoiding or abandoning what is non-virtuous karmas.

Whether one is able to identify the subtleties of virtuous and non-virtuous karmas or not, one can definitely identify and understand the difference between, what is appropriate and what is not appropriate. That can be understood by how it affects others. If one engages in certain negative activities others will not appreciate it and will not be comfortable. That would be clearly something that would be inappropriate. If we engage in such actions it would be considered inappropriate as that action harms others. Whatever actions are appreciated and of benefit for others would be what we call appropriate actions. Even in our everyday life it would be quite clear what others appreciate and what others don't appreciate. Therefore, beginning with our own family, those who are close to ourselves, those who we are living with and associating with, beginning with those that surround us, we should try to engage in what is appropriate in relation to others, and abandon what is inappropriate.

Even for someone who may not have received teachings and do not have any understanding about karma as such, the distinction between what is called virtuous karmas and non-virtuous karma; even for such people it is nevertheless clear that what is considered as being an appropriate action is appreciated and that an inappropriate action which brings harm is not appreciated. A person who does not know the distinctions about karma, and may not even know the term karma, will still identify and clearly be able to experience when someone is kind to them. They appreciate it and therefore that will be considered a good action. When someone is cruel to one it would be considered as a negative action; an action that is inappropriate.

This clearly shows that without knowing what karma is, it is still an experience any individual will have. There are certain things that will definitely be considered as good actions and certain actions that are not considered good actions, actions that bring harm and are uncomfortable. Therefore, relating to anger again, when someone is in very intense moment of anger they may not be able to recognise or see the faults of anger. Afterwards, a person with some common sense will definitely acknowledge, at least to himself or herself, that what they had done or what they had said was not really appropriate.

They might feel regret afterwards. That is a clear sign that even if they haven't studied about the negative consequences of anger, the disadvantages of anger and so forth, it's a natural experience that in a moment of anger things said or done which are inappropriate are regretted afterwards.

Do you have any questions in relation to this?

Question: How do we know when it is attachment for an object or fear that causes us to act? How do we distinguish when we are attracted to engage with a person out of craving or out of fear?

If you try to overcome attachment, you feel this desire to overcome attachment but you are scared of what might happen if you do attach.

Let's use a specific example of an object that belongs to someone else. If one has a desire to possess that object, wants that object, then it is true that one may not engage in trying to possess an object out of the fear that maybe another person would find out and one would get into trouble. That would then be clear that the intention is different because it is out of fear that you might be found out, that you might be found to be guilty. You might be afraid that if they do find out they would harm you. Even though you still have an attachment to the object you're not taking it because you have a fear of something greater, some harm that might happen later. In other words the fear of what could happen outweighs the desire for the object, but the desire is still there.

Whereas if one analyses and notices that there is desire one may immediately think, "Oh, it's not appropriate that I have a longing towards this object. First of all it doesn't belong to me, it belongs to someone else, and so it is inappropriate for me to desire it". If one thinks in that way that is overcoming one's desire through one's own internal reasonings. That is what one calls training in detachment. One overpowers that strong longing to possess it, regardless of what the consequences might be if one tries to steal it. I don't know if that helps to answer the question.

Question: I am wondering about impulses that come from an unconscious level. From what I've learnt it is the unconscious which drives behavior and to merely say I won't react in an angry manner doesn't always address the issue because behaviors are entrenched in the subconscious. I'm wondering if you can cast some enlightenment on that?

Contrary to how you describe an unconscious activity, in fact every action that we do comes from a conscious level. There is always a thought, even what we call an impulse that forms an intention to do something. What we regard as normal activities that we engage in; such as walking, talking, etc. all have an intention. That impulse itself is a thought, an intention that comes from oneself.

Geshe-la is asking if you are referring to what is called a natural tendency of beings. If you are referring to what is called a natural tendency to do things, then that is something, of course, which we will generally accept. Everyone has a natural tendency to react or do certain things without much

thought, to react in a certain way. If you are referring to that, that is something which is generally accepted.

In order to reconcile the wording, what you call 'impulse' I think Geshe-la was calling 'natural tendency'. Whether we call it an impulse or a natural tendency to do something, it appears that one is engaging in a certain action without much thought and, it appears, without an intention because it is done out of habituation. Things which are done out of habituation or impulse seem to be so natural, such as becoming upset or angry. For many it seems just so natural. We usually say that we are already angry without even realising, but in fact it is the case that there is a thought before that. There is what we call an intention or a thought before we engage in action. It's just that it happens so quickly that it appears to us that it is happening without intention or, as you would say, 'unconsciously'. In reality there's nothing that we do unconsciously. Everything is done on a conscious level. Everything is done with an intention that is a mind that one generates within oneself. I think we are dealing with the subtleties here.

There is a Tibetan expression that 'it is the nature of water to flow downwards, and it is the nature of fire to blaze upwards'. It is said in effect to something that happens naturally. Even in colloquial general language, it sounds as though there's no other causes for that to happen and it's just a natural thing. But in fact there are other causes and conditions which make water flow downwards. When water is flowing, there is a reason, there are other causes and conditions. It is an interdependent activity of water to flow down. There are other interdependent conditions that make fire blaze upwards. In normal terms we still say that water flows downwards because it is its nature, and the reason why fire blazes upwards is just its nature, and there's not much further explanation to that, generally..

Geshe-la is explaining that he understands the question comes from what we think comes without having much thought, without having a plan, we seem to engage in certain thoughts and then actions which follow those thoughts very naturally, unconsciously, as you would say. It appears to be like that, but that is only because we are so habituated over years, maybe lifetimes of habituation, in doing that kind of action or thinking in that way. We're so used to it and we have not trained our mind to look inward and identify this. We don't stop to look at our own mind, where it's coming from. It seems then that these thoughts just arise, one after another and certain ideas just pop up and we may follow those ideas in our actions and we say things, and before we know it, we have said something. It all appears just to pop out of our mind without an intention, unconsciously, but in reality if when we begin to train our mind and look inward; we will slowly begin to notice that there is, in fact, an initiator. It does come from the mind or a conscious level.

Another way of explaining our situation would be to explain it from the point of view of how our minds

are unsubdued and uncontrolled at this stage as an ordinary person. Until we put some effort into controlling our mind it may seem that the mind itself is in complete control. We allow our mind to be in control and let it influence us in what we think, say and do. That is because we make a distinction between ourselves and our mind. Right now in an ordinary situation, as an ordinary person, we let our mind control us rather than the other way around. In reality as a person, we should be the boss, we possess our mind so we're the ones who should be in control of our mind. But it's the other way around where the mind is controlling us. We allow the mind to control us, and it is mostly negative because of the habituation of the mind. In most cases, as an ordinary person, it is the negative minds that influence and control us. As a person, if we can commit ourselves to make the decision, "I want to be in control of my mind. So, I will investigate analyse my mind to find out how it works", we can then slowly turn it around.

Geshe-la sympathises: "I don't blame you for having this doubt and question because this is the situation for most of us ordinary beings, we don't seem to have control over our mind. Therefore we are influenced. As you mentioned yourself earlier, even when we know and have a wish not to do something it seems that we can't control ourselves. The mind just takes over and before we know it we already have some negative thought in our mind and then we might even go further by engaging in negative deeds. That is the situation for most of us ordinary beings, the mind is in control."

We end the session for this evening by bringing our mind inwards again, as we did earlier and focus on the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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