
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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As usual, we will do some meditation. Sit in a comfortable upright but relaxed position. As we sit with our physical bodies upright and alert, we should also make sure the mind is alert.

If we were to ask the question: “Why do we need to do meditation?”, one of the obvious reasons is that we need untangle this busy mind, which is full of many different thoughts and worldly concerns. To untangle these thoughts and quieten the mind down, we need to do meditation.

If we looked at our day to day existence, we would notice that our life is under the control of the thoughts and ideas that arise in our mind. And if we looked at what sort of thoughts and concepts arise in the mind, for ordinary being, they are mostly worldly thoughts about short-term happiness. These thoughts are constantly changing from one object to another: there’s no real structured flow to this train of thinking. This uncontrolled thinking causes our life to become chaotic and confused, and we end up being frustrated and uncertain about our direction in life.

As long as we are under the control of the negative thoughts that arise in the mind, our life will be unsettled and we will always feel confused and frustrated. Therefore, the first step is to recognise that we are under the influence of our chaotic mind. As we begin to recognise this, we will be able to slowly take control and try to remedy the situation.

Otherwise, if we let the mind just to be influenced by whatever thoughts arise, we could reach a dangerous state where we are allowing all sorts of negative impulses to arise, then blindly follow them, endangering this life, and our future lives. This could be very, very dangerous for the mind.

Therefore, it is extremely important to recognise what type of impulses and thoughts arise in the mind. How did they arise? When they do arise? How can we try to remedy that? We need to catch negative thoughts before they influence us to engage in a negative action or deed; to recognise such a thought and then to try to transform it. This is extremely important.

We can look at how our life’s activities and decisions are controlled by the impulses and thoughts that arise in the mind. If those thoughts are influenced by negative or short-term, worldly concerns, we end up becoming more confused and frustrated, and unable to attain calm, subtle states of mind. We are constantly busy trying to achieve something, yet it never seems clear what we are trying to achieve! Then, we are never really satisfied when we

achieve our worldly goals. This is an indication that the mind is very tight and narrow, because it is only focused on short-term benefit for oneself. Because that sort of mind is so self-absorbed, it brings us more and more confusion and restlessness.

One of the best remedies to counteract this is to generate an altruistic, kind and loving attitude. An altruistic attitude is a state of mind where we have more concern for others. We begin to show concern for others’ interests, taking the focus away from ourselves and looking around to see what one can do for others. We begin to open our mind and reach out to them. This is how loving kindness begins in our heart or mind: it is when we open our heart to others’ needs.

We will notice that, as soon as we have a loving, kind attitude, it will have a natural, soothing effect on our mind, and will naturally releases the tightness we feel inside. The mind will become more relaxed and calm. When we experience this, it indicates a positive state of mind, one that brings inner happiness and peace. Even if we notice this on a small scale, we can see that what we need to do from then on is to cultivate loving kindness and counteract the self-centred, self-absorbed attitude. The more we develop loving kindness, the more calm, relaxed, expansive and courageous our mind will become.

Therefore, the practice of meditation is developing the positive attitude of loving kindness and abandoning the negative, self-centred mind that is under the control of worldly concerns. (Geshe-la is emphasizing that this is a very important but slow process.) As we notice more loving kindness within our mind, we can develop that further and strengthen it. This naturally weakens its opposite – the narrow self-centred mind.

We all wish for a calm, quiet, peaceful state of mind. What we don’t wish for is a confused, frustrated state of mind. Therefore, we need to try to cultivate that which helps us achieve our aim. As mentioned earlier, this means developing loving kindness, because loving kindness helps to make our mind calmer and more peaceful, and helps us overcome our frustrated, confused states of mind. Whereas letting ourselves be influenced by the opposite, the self-centred mind, will strengthen our confused states of mind, bringing the opposite of peace. So we need to cultivate that which contributes to our wellbeing, and avoid that which destroys it.

The point of meditation is to cultivate positive states of mind and overcome negative states of mind such as anger. When we look closely at anger, it’s clear that the moment it arises in the mind we start feeling uncomfortable. The mind becomes agitated, the opposite of being peaceful and calm. When we are angry, we may appear calm and peaceful, but inwardly we would be feeling agitated and uncomfortable. This is just the immediate negative consequence of anger. At a broader level, anger can destroy and harm many others. However, even in terms of ourselves, anger disturbs our peace of mind as soon as it arises. Therefore, if don’t wish to have a disturbed, agitated state of mind, we have no

choice but to apply the antidotes to anger.

The real meaning of meditation is to recognise what state of mind we are experiencing and to transform negative states into positive ones. If we notice anger arising in our mind, we should immediately try to apply an antidote to overcome the anger and not let our mind be overpowered by it. If we can slowly begin to recognise anger and overcoming it, by reasoning that anger is not good, this process itself is what we call a meditation. Meditation means familiarising the mind with positive mental states and recognising and overcoming, negative mental states. This practice of meditation is crucial to our mind's wellbeing.

As beginners, we initially train the mind by making it more focused, using an object to focus the mind on. Then we slowly begin to develop concentration, so that we can use it to develop our meditation further. Initially the breath serves as a good object on which to focus our mind. When we start to meditate, our sessions should be short, but it is very important that for those few minutes of meditation, we commit ourselves to keeping the mind completely focused on the object. If we already, from the very start think: "I'm not very good at meditation, so whenever I meditate, it won't be focused anyway", this thinking in itself becomes an obstacle to developing any kind of concentration. It is extremely important that we recognise we have the ability – although we are just beginners, during our meditation, we should commit our full attention to it.

Sometimes it is useful to talk to ourselves, saying: "During this time, I'm going to commit myself completely to meditation. So, mind, I'm not going to allow you to be distracted. I know that you like to go out and grasp on all sorts of other things except the object you are supposed to focus on, but as soon as you get distracted, it makes me restless and uncomfortable. In fact, all the misery that I experience is because you've been distracted all this time! So now, for this time, I'm going to be in control. I'm not going to allow you to be distracted". Really take the initiative of being the boss and taking control of your mind, disciplining it to focus on the object which at the moment is the breath. Even for this short time, commit your mind to being 100% focused on the breath. Do not let the mind be in a state where it is half-focused and half-wandering away, but keep it completely focused, recalling mindfulness and the importance of doing so. *Pause for meditation.*

As mentioned earlier, when we understand the benefit of meditation, it is important to try to practise it. Meditation is really a means of bringing about more control in our life – more space, more room for us to think and expand our mind. There are times when we may be so stuck and hung up on something – when something may be going wrong and we're obsessed with it – that we just keep thinking about it again and again, going around in circles. That's how we get 'stuck' in life, when things don't seem to flow because we are hung up on something that seems wrong. Meditation, however, can help us out of feeling 'stuck'.

If we are talking about the short-term benefits of meditation, there may be times when we are so stuck and hung up about a negative situation in our lives that we may not be able to sleep well at night. Meditation can bring about the result of relaxing the mind so that we can even have a good night's sleep.

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

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.2.1.1.2.1 The principal presentation of the ten karmic deeds

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.2.1.1.2.2 Resolving karma and its effects

Referring to the section of the text that we have reached, we had the earlier division of developing the faith of conviction in karma. The second subdivision of that is reflecting on the individual divisions, which is subdivided into two: the principal presentation of the karmic deeds, and resolving karma and its effects.

So the main heading was developing the faith of conviction in karma, which is subdivided first into reflecting on the effects of karma in general, which is in turn subdivided into the way of reflecting on the individual divisions.

The way of reflecting on karma in general was explained earlier as referring to the four characteristics of karma: that karma is certain; that karma increases; that one does not encounter results one has not created the cause for; and that karma does not dissipate of its own accord.

Our earlier sessions covered the four characteristics of karma, so we are now discussing the next sub-heading, which is reflecting on the individual divisions of karma. The question may arise that after one has understood the four characteristics of karma and what kind of effects can be experienced, how should we put this knowledge into practice?

The answer, according to the text, is that whatever karma we create, positive or negative, is created through what is called the three doors: physical actions with our body, verbal action with speech and mental action by our thoughts. Positive and negative karma are created by these three modes: through our body, speech and mind.

The Buddha then explained that there are ten virtuous or non-virtuous deeds created through our body, speech and mind. Although all the subtleties of karma are not included in these ten virtuous or non-virtuous deeds, the natural positive or negative karmas can be summarised

within these ten deeds.

The ten non-virtuous deeds comprise the three types that are created through our body – killing, stealing and sexual misconduct; then there are four committed through our speech – lying, slander or divisive speech, harsh speech and idle gossip; the three non-virtues of the mind are covetousness, ill will and holding onto wrong views. The ten virtuous deeds are the opposite of these ten non-virtuous ones.

It is crucial for our own wellbeing to abandon these ten non-virtuous deeds. In explaining the ten non-virtuous deeds, Lama Tsong Khapa refers to various other sutras such as *The Treasury of Knowledge* (or *Abhidharmakosakarika* in Sanskrit). To quote from the *Abhidharmakosakarika*:

“Systematising the most obvious among them,

The Buddha said that the paths of action -

Virtues or non-virtues - are ten”.

Quoting from another sutra, *Exegesis of the discipline* :

“If you practise these three paths of action –
guarding your speech, being restrained mentally,
And not committing physical non-virtues –
you will achieve the path taught by the sage”.

Here the sage refers to Buddha. It is saying that guarding one’s physical actions, speech and mind and not committing physical, verbal or mental non-virtues becomes the ten virtuous deeds taught by the Buddha.

When we reflect on this, we begin to realise that it is very practical advice for us to follow. Abandoning the ten non-virtuous deeds and adopting the ten virtuous ones would make one a very well-mannered person – even in a worldly sense, one would be considered well-behaved and trustworthy.

Let’s consider someone who refuses to kill or steal – they will just not accept it, it is against their principles to kill or steal. Further, it is against their principles to engage in sexual misconduct or adultery. On top of that, if they refuse to lie. Who could not consider such a person as trustworthy and well-behaved? Even in a worldly sense, if anyone in any community refuses to kill, steal, engage in sexual misconduct or lie, that person would naturally be regarded as trustworthy. Leaving aside the esoteric side of religion and Buddhism – high levels of attainments and so forth – on a very practical level, we can see that the Buddha’s advice can really make anyone a worthwhile, well-behaved and good-mannered person, someone who is useful and helpful to others. This is the Dharma on a very basic level. The Dharma is said to be a tool to transform anyone who might be ill-behaved into a well-behaved, good-mannered person.

The Buddha’s teachings are also well-known as a doctrine based on non-violence. We can see how Buddhism can be definitely credited with that because the very first teaching that Buddha gives on adopting good conduct begins by advising us to not harm others by refraining from killing, stealing, engaging in adultery,

lying and so forth. These are based on the principle of non-violence, non-harmfulness towards others. Who in their right mind would not consider such conduct as being worthwhile or valid? Who would not cherish such conduct?

When we look into it further, not only humans but even animals cherish non-violence. When we look at the animal realm, we can see clearly that certain animals shy away from fiercer animals that are known to be animals of prey. When fierce animals are around, the weaker ones know instinctively that they will be harmed, so they shy try to run away from and be out of sight, or become submissive and try not to disturb those animals that could harm them. On the other hand, animals will not be afraid to be near non-predatory animals that do not harm others. So you see even animals, which are normally considered as dumb and stupid, have enough intelligence to distinguish between violent animals or non-violent ones. If even animals can cherish non-harmfulness, intelligent human beings should definitely cherish the conduct of non-harmfulness.

We will continue the explanation of the ten non-virtuous and virtuous deeds in the following sessions. Any questions?

Question (paraphrased by translator): The question is that it sounds as though there’s a separate mind that needs to control the mind, but isn’t it the mind which needs to control itself?

Answer: Even though they are related, there is the distinction between the mind and the person who needs to control it. We’re talking about a person that is separate to the mind, and the mind being in the possession of the person. Therefore the person needs to control what is being possessed, which is the mind. So there are two separate entities: the person and the mind.

If you recall the teachings of developing calm abiding or concentration, there is an analogy used to explain the uncontrolled mind that needs to be controlled. The analogy is that of a wild elephant, a rider, a pole, rope and a hook. The elephant represents our mind, the rider represents oneself, the pole represents the object on which on the mind is to be focused, and the rope represents the mindfulness. The hook is used to steer the elephant in the right direction, and if it starts to go off track, the rider will control it by poking it on the ear; the hook represents introspection, which brings the mind back to the object if it goes wandering off. With this analogy showing how to control the mind, it is clear that the person and the mind are separate entities. When we talk about the mind, we talk about it as a possession; we talk about ‘my’ mind, so this in itself is an indication that there is a person separate to the mind, which can therefore be called ‘my mind’ by the person.

Questioner: Isn’t it the mind that knows one to be a person?

Answer: That is true, but that doesn’t contradict the fact that there is the person who possesses the mind.

Questioner: It is hard to distinguish the mind from the person.

Answer: Geshe-la understands that it can be confusing, but it could even sound more confusing when you deal

with many different states of mind. Because when we talk about a mind, it's not just one solid entity in itself; it has many facets or aspects. From the negative side, for example there is attachment and anger, and when attachment is strong in the mind, anger seems to be a bit weaker. When we're very attached to someone, we're not really angry with them, but then as anger arises towards them, it is most likely that attachment towards the person will wane. It may seem like two separate things, but actually it is all happening within oneself.

Because it can be confusing, Lama Tsong Khapa emphasised very strongly in the Lam Rim, as well as in other of his teachings, that it is important to hear about the different aspects of the mind in detail. We will gain a lot of wisdom just by hearing the different explanations. But if we do not hear the explanations in detail, and only one side of the explanation or one aspect of the teaching, it can be confusing. The partial understanding of only one aspect can start causing doubts to arise in the mind. If we were left with those doubts, it could lead to misunderstandings and become misleading.

Therefore Lama Tsong Khapa emphasised the point of spending a lot of time initially in developing the wisdom of hearing the teachings. This is quite important to know. Lama Tsong Khapa emphasised the point saying that one must be very careful of the subtleties of our confusion and our negative states of mind; we must be very diligent in trying to recognise and understand them.

Lama Tsong Khapa gives a good analogy to show the need for us to be diligent in guarding our mind against even small subtleties or doubts that may arise in the mind, and trying to overcome them. If we saw a large fierce dog some distance away, we might spend our energy and time trying to protect ourselves and scare it off. However, while we are so focused on doing that, we might be attacked by a smaller dog nearby that we have ignored. We ignore the small dog, thinking that it is harmless, and put all our energy and focus into trying to overcome the big dog further away. But before the big dog reaches us, the small dog that we thought was harmless actually has attacked us. The message here is to be diligent about all doubts and negative states of mind.

Question (paraphrased by translator): The question is basically when one feels either positive or negative effects from the people around one, is that effect something in one's own mind? The effect that one feels, is it something just in one's own mind?

Answer: That is mainly in the mind. It depends on what sort of attitude we have within our mind. If we are enjoying the company of others, we may just go along with them and not really be affected by what they say or do. But in another state of mind, where we may want to be quiet and inwardly focused – then the slightest thing that others say could also disturb us. This shows that our response is mainly to do with our mind.

For example, some people are disturbed by children playing around them and making noise. But to others, it's fine, it's natural, and they just play along with the kids. Geshe-la says that he usually advises people who get irritated and disturbed by kids playing around them, that

it is good to remember that they had been children themselves at one time, making the same kind of noises and being obnoxious!

Let us now bring our mind inward again and try to maintain our focus on the mantra, which we are going to recite.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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