
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 can spend some time in meditation. Sit in a comfortable position in a relaxed manner. We should consider why we need to meditate. First of all, it is a reality that we all wish for a happy state of mind, what we call happiness, and we don't wish for suffering. This is something we all share in common; the natural wish to experience happiness and the natural wish to avoid experiencing any kind of suffering. The experience of happiness or suffering does not come about randomly without causes or conditions. Both suffering and happiness are dependent on causes for them to occur. Both experiences, suffering and happiness are an effect or a result of causes that were created in the past. Therefore it is essential if we wish to experience happiness to engage in accumulating the causes for happiness and if we don't wish to experience suffering we need to avoid the causes that produce suffering.

Because of our natural wish to experience happiness and avoid suffering we engage in many activities. In fact, whatever we do is done with an intention to bring about happiness for oneself. We can call it happiness or well-being. In the pursuit of happiness we engage in many worldly activities such as obtaining a good education and finding good jobs and so forth. All of these activities are done with the intention to bring about happiness and well being for oneself. Similarly we engage in activities so that we won't experience suffering, undesirable states. When we engage in worldly activities in the pursuit of happiness, some may find that they do get a certain kind of result from having sufficient material wealth and gains to make them physically or materialistically happy. But one needs to look further into whether material gains bring about inner happiness, whether we are really content and happy in our mind. If the pursuit has been only for material wealth one would find that even with all the material gains there is still an uncanny feeling within one's self of being empty. Somehow there is still some sort of dissatisfaction in the mind. It is not totally really content and peaceful. If one experiences that empty sort of feeling and discontent in one's mind, it is a clear indication that the pursuit of our happiness has not been fruitful. We have not engaged in the right sort of causes to bring about real inner happiness. That is something we need to investigate.

Sometimes those who have gained a sufficient amount of material wealth still feel that there is something missing within themselves and have that empty feeling of discontent. Sometimes it is even a feeling like sadness within one's mind. Without any really apparent reason, they feel unhappy within their mind. If that is one's experience one should investigate and look into one's life and see what is going wrong. If having sufficient material needs around oneself does not bring inner satisfaction, inner contentment

and happiness within oneself, what is going wrong? Why isn't one totally happy?

According to the explanations in the Buddhist teachings if one doesn't have a controlled mind material gains can actually contribute to the unhappiness within one's mind. What causes unhappiness within one's mind are the negative emotions such as strong desires, anger, jealousy, pride, and a sense of discontentment. These, what we call, negative emotions or attitudes within our mind are actually the causes for feeling unhappy within one's mind. If we look further into material gains they contribute to enhancing these negative states of mind. If one obtains some material gain, then one wishes to gain more. In the pursue of getting better and more things, that contributes to increasing our attachments and desire within one's mind. Then there are bound to be others who are wealthier than one. When we see that others have more, then that brings jealousy and a sense of competitiveness in one's mind. We want to compete with others, trying to be better each time, in the pursuit of wealth or social status. We pursue wealth to gain some well-being and happiness but when we investigate further we find that the very material objects that we worked so hard to gain becomes a cause to bring about unhappiness and misery within one's own mind. Material gain and status are actually not the direct cause of an unhappy mind. Rather they serve more as a conditional cause for us to have an unhappy mind. When we investigate further, the real cause for having an unhappy mind lies within the mind itself. Within our mind is what we call a confused state of mind, a mind that allows negative emotions to control or influence one's mind. That then brings unhappiness within one's mind. The material objects are actually not the main source or cause for an unhappy mind but serve as a conditioning. Therefore, when we investigate further in this way, and come to realise that the real source of our unhappiness actually lies within oneself. That it is the distracted and confused mind itself. When we realize this, then we can pursue a means of generating real happiness within one's mind by overcoming the distracted mind.

The best way to overcome the distracted mind is to engage in what we call meditation. Through meditation we begin to focus inward and have more controlled and focussed mind. As the mind becomes more and more focussed and less distracted it becomes much more relaxed, peaceful and calm. Once one has a content and focussed mind, material gain can only serve as a means to enhance our physical happiness and give us some external wellbeing. There is nothing wrong in experiencing some external wellbeing if our mind is naturally content. It is important for us, in our investigation, to identify what is the real cause of our sufferings and what are the real causes for happiness. To come to a wrong conclusion, that material wealth itself is the main cause of unhappiness and then go to the extreme position of thinking that by just getting rid of material wealth we will solve the problem, is not a solution. Once the mind itself is controlled and focussed one could have material gains and really enjoy them in a detached manner. The main point here that is explained in Buddhism is that external objects are neither the main cause for our happiness nor the main cause for our suffering but rather serve as the conditions for either temporary happiness or suffering to be experienced. The main cause lies within our own mind. Therefore, to achieve a peaceful mind we engage in meditation, training our mind

to be focussed and then naturally, slowly it becomes more and more content and peaceful.

Having identified the main cause for the unhappiness we experience in our mind, which is the confused and distracted mind; having understood that in order to overcome the distracted mind one needs to have a focussed mind which can be trained through meditation; one may wish to gain a focussed mind quickly and be very zealous and try to do a lot of meditation to start with. That would, however, be a wrong approach. Our mind has been conditioned for many years. Just in this life for many years, the mind has been continuously distracted. It's so used to distraction and being influenced by the negative states of minds that to suddenly try to overcome that and decondition it overnight is just not possible. It is not realistic. Instead the realistic approach in meditation is to begin with a very gradual process. This means that even when one begins to meditate, one begins by doing a very short session, just for a few minutes. As a beginner one can start by trying to have a focussed mind for one minute and then increasing that to a few more minutes. One needs to slowly increase and be patient with the process of one's meditation. If one continuously engages in meditation in this way one will definitely get a result.

As mentioned earlier, the process of meditation is to develop a focussed mind and we need to choose the right object to focus on, such as the breath. By just focussing on our breath, even for a few moments, we will naturally find that the mind becomes calmer and more peaceful. Just by bringing our mind inward and not allowing our mind to be distracted with other worldly thoughts and ideas will, in itself, definitely bring a calming effect to the mind. We can now sit in an upright position and bring our mind inward and place it on the breath, focussing on the breath. Geshe-la emphasises one should have 100% focus on our breath for few minutes.

Pause for meditation

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

In last week's session we explained how the negative actions or positive actions that we engage in are committed through what is called the three doorways. This is an analogy that refers to our body, speech and mind. Through our physical actions, our verbal speech and the thoughts that arise in our mind, in these three ways, we engage in either virtuous or non-virtuous actions. To summarise the positive actions the Buddha explained the ten virtuous deeds and to summarise the negative actions the Buddha explained the ten non-virtuous or negative deeds.

We have quoted the Buddha's teachings, the sutras, earlier. The summarised meaning is that having identified the ten non-virtuous deeds, one refrains from engaging or acting out those ten negative deeds to the extent that even the intention of committing the ten negative deeds does not

occur in the mind. If one can practice in that way, completely avoiding in one's thoughts and one's deeds the ten non-virtuous actions, then to that extent, one will be leading what is called a virtuous life.

Lama Tsong Khapa further explains that on top of avoiding the ten non-virtuous deeds one adopts the ten virtuous deeds that are the actual opposites of the ten negative deeds. One makes a commitment to engage in the actual opposites of the ten non-virtuous deeds. For example, the opposite of killing is to make a commitment in one's mind to refrain from killing, and so forth. One makes these commitments in one's mind and practices them. That really becomes the way to begin to live what is called a righteous life where we make a promise to ourselves to refrain from harming others.

The emphasis here is that practising avoiding the ten non-virtuous deeds and adopting the ten virtuous deeds becomes the basis for us to obtain all the further higher practices and realisations that are gained from those practices in the Buddhist path. It is the basis for us to obtain a good rebirth in the next life and the basis for us to attain liberation and achieve enlightenment. Therefore this very practice of avoiding ten non-virtuous deeds and adopting the ten virtuous deeds becomes a basic practice for all three scopes in Buddhism.

When we look into the actual advice of practising the ten virtues and avoiding the ten non-virtuous deeds we can see that the advice the Buddha has given is actually very practical which is possible for us to engage in. We can see the immediate result is practising a path or leading a life of non-violence and that is why the Buddha's teachings are said to be the conduct of non-violence. In fact, all religion is based on love and compassion, as his Holiness the Dalai Lama often emphasises. His Holiness says this because all religion has the basis of non-violence. When we look into the structure of Buddhism and how, from the very start, it talks about refraining from harming others we can definitely see that it is structured and based on a non-violent approach.

In Christianity we find that there is a definite emphasis on avoiding harm to others. Similarly we find that Hinduism and other religions definitely have the basis of non-harmfulness or non-violence. We may find that these religions have different ways of explaining it, or a different emphasis on what non-violence is and how to practice it. There may be different approaches and differences in explanation of non-violence, but we can definitely say that every religion does have the basis of non-violence.

The need for non-violence is, of course, something that we all accept. Even if one is not a religious person the need for non-violence can be understood and appreciated. The need to be non-violent can be understood when one takes oneself as an example. When someone harms one, we do not feel comfortable do we? There is no one who would feel comfortable when there is harm inflicted upon them. No one likes to be harmed, physically, verbally or mentally. One does not wish to experience any kind of harm whatsoever. If one does not wish harm upon oneself then one can understand that it is the same for others. Others don't want to experience harm as well.

Buddhism explains the practice of non-harmfulness or non-violence as a basis to obtain real peace in one's mind that is actually the peace of liberation. However, in practical terms when everyone talks about world peace, what is world peace? How can world peace come about? First of all one

looks into why there is no world peace now. What is missing for us to have world peace? It is very clear that the reason why we consider there is no world peace is because that there is so much violence. In the absence of violence there would naturally be world peace. So what causes that violence? It is harmful intentions. When those intentions are translated into physical deeds, there is harm and violence that causes unrest and disturbance in families, nations and the world. In order to have world peace, individuals must practice non-violence and adopt the way of leading a righteous life. The practice of non-violence serves our ultimate goals and temporary goals of having peace within oneself, one's family and relationships, and in the world. One may not consider oneself religious, even Buddhist, but the appreciation of non-violence can definitely be understood and appreciated by everyone. The practice of non-violence is also something that does not need to be complicated and sophisticated. One does not need to rely on different kinds of high esoteric practices or explanations. It is based very much on one's own experience. If one were to ask how does one practice non-violence, it is by avoiding inflicting on others what one does not wish to experience oneself. It is as simple as that. When someone abuses us in any way, criticises us or inflicts either physical or verbal abuse upon us, we immediately dislike that and feel uncomfortable. It is therefore natural for us to assume that others would feel uncomfortable if we physically harm or verbally abuse them as well.

If we can just practice not inflicting upon others what we don't like to experience ourselves then that, in itself, becomes a very good way to bring about real harmony within one's own mind. It brings a good understanding and harmony in our relationships with whomever one is living, family, partner or any other kind of relationship. That kind of goodwill and good feeling can arise when one begins to voluntarily and intentionally engage in not harming others. That very thought of not wishing to harm others brings about a good feeling, a good understanding. It is very important to really try to practice, starting with our surroundings, with the close ones that we deal with in our daily life. There is a Tibetan saying, 'with close relations that we wake up, eat, work and spend the night together with, are those with whom we share everything, all joys and sorrows. That kind of close, intimate relationship, whether it's in the family or with partners, is the very people that we have to deal with.

If we don't practise non-violence or non-harmfulness with our close ones and instead have a noble thought that I'm going to practice non-violence and promote world peace, is completely contradictory. On a larger scale a Buddhist noble thought is to help all sentient beings. However discarding the very beings that surround you on a daily basis and not practising with them, while maintaining a noble thought that one wishes to benefit many other beings outside, is a completely absurd or contradictory way of thinking. The emphasis is to really practice with those that we associate with on a daily basis, and as we begin to develop our practice with those that we relate with on a daily basis, to have a good relationship, harmony and a good feeling, then we can slowly extend from there.

We often complain about the violence in the world. We associate our unrestfulness and our frustration with the violence that is occurring in other parts of the world. We often complain that there are wars going on and bombs

being thrown. Of course we have a concern for the people there but nevertheless we may sometimes feel that it's because of the wars, all the violence going in the world that the world is without peace and that disturbs our own peace and well being. In reality what is really disturbing one's own peace is the disharmony that one contributes to within one's own surrounding. This begins with having harmful intentions in our own mind. We may use violence with our physical body or our speech. We may use violence in our surroundings, using harsh words and so forth with the people that we live with. That is the real bomb that disturbs our peace, not the bombs that are thrown in another countries. When we think about the suffering and the unrest that is going on in other countries, it might disturb our mind for a while but we will easily forget it. After awhile we just go on with our life and we forget about it. Meanwhile what is really disturbing us on a continuous daily basis, is the disharmony that we feel within our own mind. The real bomb that is disturbing us is that of our own negative states of mind, the harmfulness or violence within our own mind. If we wish to experience real peace within our mind we must make the attempt to reduce the bombing with negative thoughts in our own mind, and combat the negative states of mind within oneself. As we develop a loving attitude towards ourselves and those who surround us we can then definitely contribute to our well being and real peace in our mind.

We may have a few minutes for questions if you have any. Otherwise we can stop here for the evening?

Question. If I see my cat trying to kill a bird and I save that bird is that helping my karma and/or my cat's karma?

If you actually save the bird and the cat does not attack it, it will definitely benefit the cat's karma. If the cat were to have attacked and harmed the bird the cat would have created negative karma. Having saved the bird means that you have prevented the cat from engaging in that act of harming the bird that would have made the cat create negative karma. So by avoiding those circumstances it has helped the cat's karma.

Question. What about if it is a wild cat and it needs that animal for food, to survive. Should you interfere?

In relation to the consequences that can be experienced from negative karma, it would be better that the cat starves and doesn't kill. The benefit that the cat gets from killing a bird would be only a temporary satisfaction of filling its stomach. The negative karma created by the killing the bird, or whatever animal, would cause them to experience much more negative consequences. So, if we think in karmic terms if we can prevent a wild cat from creating negative karma it would be far better than letting them engage in negative karma. If we allow an animal, even a wild animal, to continue with their negative deed of killing its not just once, it will continue on and on an on. If killing goes on for months and years in that way they accumulate much negative karma over a long period of time. If one can prevent that they would not create that negative karma even once, that is already helping them.

Question. This goes totally against the concept of the natural food chain. It's just a natural process, one has to eat something in order to survive. So what does this all lead to? Shouldn't we allow the food chain to just go on and not interfere?

The explanation of the food chain is based on what is considered to be a natural process. When we look from a

general, worldly point of view it can be seen or understood as a natural process. It is a fact that as a human being we need food to sustain ourselves and therefore we engage in a lot of activities to get food. Work and all that are basically done so that we can get something to eat and have good shelter. Likewise wild animals need food to survive as well. To that extent we see that is natural for them to get the food that they need. For some wild animals it means preying on and attacking other animals so that they can consume them to survive. But that does not mean that they do not create negative karma in that process. If the question is about karma, whether karma is created, just because we do something that we would consider is only natural because we have been habituated to doing it that way, like now without eating naturally we might die; But that doesn't mean that we have to always survive on food. We can train our mind in meditation where we don't have to survive on gross food. Likewise with animals. Even though what we call the food chain may seem a natural process whereby animals have to eat smaller animals and so forth that does not mean that they don't create negative karma. Negative karma is created and they will have to experience the consequences.

Question. (inaudible)

If we were not to talk about karma specifically and just talk about natural processes of how things are we can say yes, it's a natural process of wild animals to kill other animals of prey and consume them. That's a natural process and just leave it at that. But when we're talking about karma, it is true that on one hand we may not be able to interfere and completely stop the process, but nevertheless we may be able to contribute in some way or another to stop an animal creating negative karma. Even if we were able to stop them creating some negative karma, for even a short time, that can be a positive imprint for that animal. In the process of karma even small positive imprints can contribute to their well being in the future. I think what Geshe-la is pointing out is that we may not be able to take extreme measures right away, but with an understanding of karma, we may be able to intervene in a way that is beneficial. If one can contribute to the animal's good karma by preventing it from killing and so forth, even for a short time, that can prevent it from creating some negative karma.

Question. To prevent harm or anger arising is it a good idea when you see someone else in a difficult state to look at a person's actions as separate to their potential i.e. as the action being separate from the good potential of the person.

Definitely. As you explain yourself, it will be helpful to distinguish between the actions of the person and the potential the person has. That is definitely helpful. It is very similar to the advice I give to people in bringing up their children. I often advise parents, or people who have to take care of children, not to scold the children themselves for doing something wrong and have them think that they're bad because they did something. Instead of saying that they are bad point out to them that what they are doing is harmful to them and not useful. There is different to saying, "Oh you shouldn't do that, you are bad because you did that". If you say that to a child, the child will immediately feel hurt, frustrated and rejected. When they feel rejection it will be hard for them to listen to advice. Instead, tell them that certain actions that they are doing, whatever actions they may be, are bad, not that they are bad. Distinguish in this way and point out that if they engage in such an action,

because the action is bad it will harm them. "You are ok, but if you do this action it will harm you and because I feel sorry for you, I don't want you to be hurt".

To further elaborate on this, I often ask people about a situation where a young child starts blaming their parents and says that their parents were not good to me, they were not kind to me. That it is your fault. If children are accusing their mother and father of being naughty, where is that from? It's from the mother and father saying that to the child. Once when they were having lunch and Tara was five years old and Suzanne was about three Geshe-la started to tell Suzanne, "Oh, she is very nice girl" as a test to see what Tara would say. Tara mentioned that she is actually naughty sometimes. (laughter). Then Geshe-la said to Tara, "Sometimes your father is naughty?" and she said "yes". Then he said, "Sometimes your mother is naughty?" and she said "yes". And then he said "Sometimes you're naughty," and she said, "I am not naughty".

As we did earlier, sit in a comfortable, meditative posture and bring our mind inwards and focus on the mantra to be recited.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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