
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 spend some time in meditation. Please sit in an upright position. By meditating one develops concentration. The definition of concentrative meditation is being able to focus the mind single-pointedly on any object. When one obtains that ability one has developed concentration. In order to develop concentration, one has to have a stable, single-pointed focus on the object. The first part of the method for keeping the mind focused single pointedly on an object is to generate mindfulness. The second part is to develop introspection which is a state of mind that investigates, or checks, whether the mind is focused on the object or not. The distinction between mindfulness and introspection is that mindfulness maintains the mind focused on the object and introspection investigates whether the mind is distracted or not, and when it finds it is distracted, it brings the mind back on the object.

In the development of concentration one needs to keep the mind focused single pointedly on the object. External or internal distractions prevent the mind being single pointedly focused on the object and cause the mind to wander off from the object. It is important to guard the mind from distractions. When we allow the mind to be influenced by distractions it becomes chaotic and confused. It causes unrest in the mind, a lot of worries and the feeling of being depressed and so forth follows from that. These uncomfortable states of mind occur because the mind is influenced by distractions.

The distractions come in different forms. Most common are conceptual distractions where we have many random thoughts that just arise in the mind based on worldly thoughts. If we allow the mind to be distracted by these worldly conceptual thoughts, it leads to all the frustrations and so forth. When we don't control our mind and allow the mind to be influenced we are not in control ourselves. If we take control of our mind and keep it focused on the virtuous object, and do not allow the mind to be distracted, and train it in that way, we can slowly improve the mind to become more and more in tune with the virtuous object. In this way our mind becomes more settled and guarded from distractions.

As soon as a worldly conceptual thought arises in our mind it disturbs the mind leading to the mind becoming frustrated, uncomfortable or depressed. These sort of conceptual thoughts, whatever they may be, usually arise in relation to certain objects or situations that firstly arise in the mind. Normally we don't stop to think about the conceptual thoughts that arise in the mind and we don't give a second thought to the way that they can lead to the

mind becoming more depressed. Without being aware of that risk, we just allow the mind to be influenced and don't control our mind to separate ourselves from the distraction. We just become one with those distractions and allow the mind to become depressed.

We have a certain amount of wisdom in our mind that enables us to be able to distinguish and notice these distracted thoughts as they arise. If we can use this wisdom to detect and recognise distracted thoughts as they arise in the mind, we can then, as soon as they arise, let them go and not allow the mind to follow those distracted thoughts. Certain distracted thoughts can be very noticeable within one and often we can observe them in others. When certain thoughts arise strongly in the mind they can affect the physical appearance; the face can become red etc. Rather than allowing our mind to be influenced by these thoughts, and thinking about them over and over again, it is best to recognise them and bring the mind inwards and keep it focused on a virtuous thought, thinking about a virtuous object and trying to apply the antidote for overcoming the negative thought. In this way we train our mind not to be influenced by the worldly conceptual distractions.

The objective of meditation is to free our minds from distractions by separating ourselves from the distracted mind and keeping the mind single pointedly focussed on a chosen object. This may be either a virtuous object or a neutral object. In this case we use the breath, which is a neutral object, as our object. Keeping the mind completely, hundred percent, focussed on the breath will allow the mind to quieten down because it is separating the mind from the normal conceptual distracted thoughts.

The word for single-pointed in Tibetan is "Tse-chik", Tse means point, and "pointed" here means to keep the mind pointed (focussed) on an a chosen object, such as the breath. Chik means single, so "single" means to have only one object, in this case the breath, and not allowing the mind to think about any other object. So "single pointed" basically means to focus on the chosen object and nothing else except that object. When we decide to do that, when we put our full attention and make a determination to keep our mind focussed on the object, we can definitely experience the effect. As mentioned earlier, and in previous sessions as well, it's a gradual process starting with focus for a few moments, single pointedly on the chosen object. In that way we train our mind slowly, slowly, to become more and more familiar in focussing single pointedly on the object and we can slowly develop what is called concentration. We will now sit in an upright, comfortable and relaxed position and keep our mind focussed on the breath. (*Pause for meditation*).

It is good to spend some time in meditation. Everyone should put some time and energy into trying to do some meditation on a regular basis. It really helps the mind to calm down a bit. In the practice of meditation the main objective is to settle the mind down and as the mind settles down it becomes more stable. The whole objective of meditation is to try to maintain a stable mind; a mind

that is not easily influenced by external distractions or external mishaps. What normally think is that external things make us feel sad and unhappy. It is either our relationships with another person or some other situation out there that makes our mind unhappy. Whatever it may seem to be out there that is disturbing our happiness and peace, what really contributes to our unhappiness in our own mind. If our mind is vulnerable to whatever happens out there, then it is this uncontrolled mind that is already distracted and very fragile that allows the external thing to make us feel sad. If the mind itself has become stable and firm through meditation, it cannot be influenced by external mishaps then it can remain calm and peaceful. Therefore it really depends on our attitude, which is in our own mind. A very practical thing to do when you hear about mishaps and are influenced by people criticising you, is when it comes in through one ear, just let it go out from the other. Don't hold on to it for too long, just throw it behind you.

Geshe-la relates a story about a friend, a person he knew, and who had mentioned to him that he had a girlfriend who was a little bit younger than him. She had a habit of complaining about a lot of things not being right, a lot of criticisms and so forth. He told Geshe-la that initially he tried to answer back and respond but it ended up creating more conflict, more arguments so he developed a way of just letting it go. Whatever she said he just didn't pay attention. He mentioned that he didn't know if he could completely rely on her because he was elderly. He thought, "Maybe she might leave me anyway one day". So he didn't pay too much attention and just let it be. That led to less conflict because he didn't respond. In other words he didn't take it too personally. She would criticise him for not washing his own underwear and so on. He actually just did it himself and that didn't lead to more conflict. She would also criticise him for playing cards, he had a habit of playing cards. He however didn't allow her criticism to stop him doing what he most enjoyed, playing cards. He said he just continued playing cards whatever she said.

The story goes on and they had a child. After some time they sent the child to schooling in Darjeeling, a hill station in India. Once when he was on his way back after visiting the child the bus had quite a bad accident and he broke his leg and could not walk for about a year. During that time she took such good care of him that he felt completely confident that she really actually loved him and would take care of him and would stay with him. That improved his confidence and he didn't mind at all what she would say. Geshe-la says that he would say that even though she has quite a big mouth and says a lot of things, "I don't care because she really loves me. She really cared for me when I was in real distress and in a vulnerable time." These kind of stories relate to how it's good to be tolerant sometimes, not let things affect you. Show a little bit of patience and you may also have good results in the end.

A lot of the disputes, arguments, that happen between individuals, are very much based on misunderstandings. A lot of wrong ideas then get placed on top of these

misunderstandings. It can be as insignificant as saying something at the wrong time. Even though it's not something really bad because it was said at the wrong time, perhaps because one was not feeling at all up to it, it might really hurt. Sometimes it maybe just be that there is a misunderstanding or miscalculation over timing. If we arrange to meet somewhere at a certain time and someone is 10, 15 minutes late, or they couldn't make it at all, we get very upset and that one thing, one instant, can lead to many other bad thoughts and hard feelings arise. When we look into what causes a dispute in the first place it could be something quite insignificant. But we take it too personally and we hold onto it. It's good to investigate how these misunderstandings, arguments, arise and try to develop some patience in our mind.

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 the last session we mentioned how the Lam Rim explains that adopting the morality of observing the ten virtuous deeds, which is the opposite of the ten non-virtuous deeds, is a basis for obtaining all other higher realisations. Lama Tsong Khapa was quoting from different sutras indicating how crucial adopting the ten virtuous deeds and avoiding the ten non-virtuous deeds is. Lama Tsong Khapa quotes from another text, *Commentary on the "Middle Way"* by Chandrakirti in which he summarised the significance of the Buddha's praise in the *"Sutra of the Ten Levels"* for the ethical discipline in which you eliminate the ten non-virtues.

"For ordinary beings, those born from the Buddha's speech, those whose natures are certain as self-enlightened or conqueror's children, there are no causes of certain goodness or high status apart from ethical discipline."

This quote from Chandrakirti's *"Middle Way"* refers to four types of beings. They are: 'ordinary beings' - those who do not have any realisations yet, 'those born from the Buddha's speech' - hearers, "those whose natures are certain as self-enlightened" - solitary realisers, and 'conquerors children' - bodhisattvas. It says there are no other causes of certain goodness or high status for these beings apart from ethical discipline. 'Certain goodness' refers to the ultimate goals of liberation and enlightenment. 'High status' refers to higher rebirths as a human being or in the deva and god realms. There is no cause for certain goodness or high status apart from ethical discipline. Ethical discipline here refers

specifically to the discipline of observing the ten virtues and avoiding the ten non-virtues. When it says that there is no other cause for certain goodness or high status apart from ethical discipline it means there is no other causes which is not combined with ethical discipline. There are other causes for certain goodness or high status but these separate causes rely, in themselves, on ethical discipline. Any other causes that contribute to liberation, enlightenment and higher rebirth in the next lifetime are all combined or accompanied with ethical discipline. So, the main point from the quote is, that for any type of sentient being who wishes to obtain the goals of certain goodness or high status, they have to base their practice on the ethics of adopting the ten virtuous deeds.

It is very, very important to understand and realise that ethical discipline is the real basis for us to attain all our goals. In that regard, ethical discipline becomes the real refuge that can save us from mishaps in this life, but particularly save us from the sufferings of the lower realms in future lives. We talk about three objects of refuge and external refuge such as the Buddha and enlightened beings can of course help us. But the dharma is called the real refuge - the actual refuge, because it is by putting into practice the dharma, which really saves us from falling into the lower realms. When we decide to voluntarily engage in the practice of avoiding the ten non-virtuous deeds and adopting the practice of the ten virtuous deeds, we create the actual cause for us not to fall into the lower realms. Therefore, in that regard, it is called the actual refuge which really protects us. Even though external deities and so forth can help us, the real protection comes from within our own mind. That's why it's called the actual refuge, the dharma.

The Kadampa master, Geshe Kalungpa, mentions that avoiding engaging in the ten non-virtuous deeds, and thus adopting the ten virtuous deeds, becomes the most essential practice for us to attain all our goals. Therefore whoever influences us in adopting the ten virtuous deeds and avoiding the ten non-virtuous deeds is the actual, real, virtuous friend. Whoever it may be, in whatever guise they may appear in, they are the actual, virtuous friend. Anyone who influences us in the positive path of adopting the ten virtuous deeds and avoiding ten non-virtuous deeds; be they ordained monks or nuns, or laypersons, however they may be dressed and whether they have long or short hair, if they are helping us to adopt the ten virtuous deeds and avoid the ten non-virtuous deeds, then that person is a real virtuous friend.

Furthermore, a person who influences us to engage in the 10 virtues will also be called a "noble being". The Tibetan word is *Kiwo Dampa*, which I think can be translated as a "noble being". A noble being is a being who is noble in the sense of leading us in a righteous way, in the dharma way. Such a being can also be called a true yogi and a true ascetic because a yogi and ascetic is someone who has devoted their time in complete virtue. Therefore someone who influences us in a positive way is for us a holy person, a virtuous friend, a noble being, a yogi and an ascetic all in one.

I am covering the text slowly going over the main points,

so we will continue in the following sessions. For this evening we can stop here with some time for questions if you have few questions.

Question. What is the difference between the different realms?

The six realms can be divided into the three lower realms and the three higher realms. The three lower realms are the hellish realm where beings suffer a lot, the hungry ghost or hungry spirit realm and the animal realm. Those are the three lower realms. The higher realms are the human realm, and then the demi-god and the celestial god realms. Within the six realms we are obviously in the human realm but we can see and relate to the animal realm as well. There are some people who are known to be able to relate to the spirit or the god realms as well. A more detailed description and explanation of the six realms will come later in the teachings. When the results of the ten virtues and the ten non-virtuous deeds are explained the six realms will be explained as a result of the karmas that we adopt.

If there aren't any questions we can go on a bit further in the text.

Lama Tsong Khapa goes on to further explain that one must repeatedly guard one's ethical discipline by maintaining a sense of restraint. There are some who have no such restraint in absorbing the ethics of even one single practice of ethical discipline and still claim to be a practitioner of the Mahayana. Lama Tsong Khapa mentions that it is very dishonourable to claim such a thing. To emphasise this, Lama Tsong Khapa quotes from the "*Sutra of Ksitigarbha*" that states:

"By means of these ten paths of virtue you will become a Buddha. However there are those who, for as long as they live, do not even minimally maintain even a single path of virtuous action but who say such things as, 'I am a Mahayana practitioner; I seek unexcelled perfect enlightenment.' Such people are great hypocrites and liars. They deceive the world in the presence of all the Bhagavan Buddhas and they preach nihilism. When they die they seem confused and they fall back."

To further explain the meaning of the quote from the sutra; Adopting the ten virtues becomes a basis for one to become a Buddha, but there are those who do not follow the ten virtuous deeds and avoid the ten non-virtues, not even a single one, and still say that they are a Mahayanist. That is real hypocrisy. "Such people are great hypocrites and liars", indicates that a person who claims that they are a Mahayana practitioner but does not maintain a single ethical discipline is like a hypocrite and liar. They are hypocrites because, any Mahayana practice, has to be based on ethical discipline. It is the basis on which further practices are done. To claim that one is Mahayanist but not even practice the basic practice is definitely hypocrisy. They are also liars because they don't practice what they claim to be. Furthermore "they deceive the world in the presence of all the Bhagavan Buddhas" means, since they have made vows in front of the Buddhas and so forth and say that they will help all sentient beings, but do not practice or follow the discipline, they are then deceiving the world. It is as

though “they are preaching nihilism.” When they die they seem confused and fall back”, refers to falling into the lower realms. When they die the negative consequences of not adopting the ten virtues and engaging in the ten non-virtuous deeds and being a hypocrite and a liar and deceiving the world in front of the Bhagavan Buddhas definitely becomes the cause to fall into the lower realms.

Lama Tsong Khapa, having quoted this sutra, is emphasizing the point that one should not follow such examples of claiming to be a Mahayana practitioner but not practising even a single point of ethical discipline. This also refers to any claims of realisations and so forth that one does not have. That is actually considered to be one of the biggest lies and hypocrisies. If one is not engaging in even a basic practice and makes such claims it is a great lie and deceiving others. To guard ourselves from such downfalls Lama Tsong Khapa is emphasizing that one must practice and adopt the ten virtuous deeds to the best of one’s ability.

With that we conclude for this evening. As mentioned earlier we can sit in an upright but relaxed posture and focus on the mantra to be recited.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

Transcribed from tape by Gabrielle Thomson or Lois Smith

Edit 1 by Mary-Lou Considine or John Burch

Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

Edited Version

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