
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, it would be good to spend some time doing meditation. Most of you already know from previous explanations what meditation means – choosing a virtuous object on which to focus and keeping the mind focused single-pointedly on that object.

Meditation is helpful for the mind because the focus object is virtuous. When we focus on a virtuous object, we gain more control over the mind. As we gain more control over the mind, it naturally becomes calmer and more peaceful, and we experience a happy state of mind.

This is crucial for us because, although we can rely on external objects to gain a certain amount of physical happiness, these objects do not necessarily contribute to our mental happiness. Most of our worldly activities are done with the intention of gaining some happiness. However, we usually find that this temporary physical happiness doesn't become a cause for mental happiness. Therefore, it is essential to find a proper means of gaining some real mental happiness, which we can do through meditation.

When people reach an advanced age, physical happiness is no longer much of a concern to them. However, for younger generations, for example in Australia, there is no lack of conditions for physical happiness and wellbeing. We can see that most people are striving and working towards that physical wellbeing.

While we can say that Australia does not lack the conditions for material happiness, when we look into the conditions available for mental peace and happiness, we can see that we are still a little bit backward. When we look into the conditions required for mental happiness, we see that it definitely comes from having a controlled mind – a mind that is subdued, focused inward and not influenced by external distractions. We need to clearly understand that mental unrest is caused by the conceptual distractions that arise in the mind.

At those times when we have all the physical conditions for happiness yet still feel unhappy and mentally agitated, we should investigate what is causing this agitation. Some people might think: "Even though I have all the external conditions, maybe I need a good relationship. If I had a good partner, maybe I'd be very happy". However, if we investigate further, we can see that this would become just another distraction: it would not bring real mental happiness. Having a girlfriend or boyfriend will not solve the problem of lacking mental happiness, peace and calmness.

What contributes to real mental happiness and peace is

having a mind focused on virtue. When the mind is focused on virtue, it becomes more subdued and we experience more mental calmness and rest. It is very important to understand that the real problem that causes us unhappiness is not outside, but within our own mind. Once we are able to control this busy, distracted mind, which is continuously going outside to look for happiness, and begin to focus it inwardly, then we will experience a calm mind. Therefore, meditation is the real tool for attaining a more focused and controlled mind.

Although we are emphasising the means to gain mental happiness, we are in no way underestimating the value of physical happiness and wellbeing. You need happiness on both levels, the physical and the mental. Rather, what we are saying is that you already have many means of gaining temporary physical happiness – getting a good job, education and so forth – and you are already putting effort into those goals.

But you need to ask yourself is it enough just to have some physical wellbeing? Does that make you really happy? If the answer is that, even with good physical conditions, your mind is still not happy, then you can investigate further whether there are some means by which you can get some inner happiness.

This is where meditation is emphasised. First, you need to focus your mind on a virtuous object and keep it focused. Then, keeping the mind focused, generate virtuous states of mind such as loving-kindness, compassion and kindness to others. From a very practical level, with whatever ability you have, begin to do short meditations, focusing the mind inwards and generating a good heart and kindness towards others. In this way, you can slowly progress, gaining more mental stability and happiness.

On a practical level, those with a happy mind find it very easy to have many friends. Further, they are able to deal efficiently with difficult situations.

The reason why a happy person would have many friends is because it's easy for people to be with a happy person. When you are around a happy person, it makes you feel happy too. Therefore, people are naturally drawn to a happy person. If someone is always negative, having an unhappy mind, being grumpy and so forth, it's hard for people to go near them, because they feel uncomfortable being near such a person. Therefore, having a happy mind is really a good companion because it provides us with more companions to have around us.

Further, if you have a stable, happy mind, it is easier to deal with difficult situations because even if outer conditions are not the best, you can still maintain a happy attitude and external conditions will not disturb your peace of mind. Even if you have all the good outer conditions but do not have a happy mind, you could still be miserable. Therefore, developing a happy mind through the means mentioned earlier, you can maintain a good attitude in your life.

Also, having a happy mind contributes to our physical wellbeing, health and long life. Therefore, in that way, it is also very practical.

When we reach the point at which we agree that we should have a happy mind, we might then think: “I would like to have a happy mind, but how can that come about? I don’t seem to have a happy mind”. At this point, we reflect on the Buddha’s teaching, where it is explained that if we desire a happy mind, we need to develop the causes for a happy mind. A happy mind does not come about out of the blue, without causes and conditions. Rather, it needs specific causes and conditions. Likewise, an unhappy mind is also the result of certain causes and conditions.

When we understand how having a happy mind depends on us creating the appropriate causes and conditions, we can use our wisdom to check up on which causes and conditions create a happy mind, and which causes and conditions contribute to an unhappy mind. Once we develop the causes for a happy mind, even if we think “I don’t want to have a happy mind”, it will come about naturally. The natural result of creating the causes for a happy mind will be to have a happy mind.

In this way, we use our wisdom to identify the causes and conditions for a happy mind, then put some effort into developing those causes and conditions. Even after identifying the causes and conditions for a happy mind, we may still then think: “Maybe it’s too difficult for me”, but we must identify that as laziness. Through laziness, we may neglect creating the actual causes.

Now we will take the opportunity to use our time and energy to focus on the meditation object, which in this case is the breath. As mentioned earlier, sit in an upright but comfortable position for meditation, then determine that for the next few minutes that you will not allow your mind to be distracted, because it is the distractions that bring all the unrest, frustrations and so forth to one’s mind. This time think: “I will take control of my mind and keep it focused on the breath”.

While you focus on the breath, try not to be too tense, because that would not be the right method, but keep the mind focused on the breath in a relaxed way, just being aware of the mind when the distractions arise and bringing back the mind gently back to the breath again. In this way, put your focus 100% on the breath and maintain that focus.

(Pause for meditation)

Now you may come out of your 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 Reflecting on karma and its effect in general

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.2.1.2 Reflecting on karma and its effects in detail

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.2.1.3 Having reflected on karma and its effects, how to engage in virtue and turn away from non-virtue.

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.2.1.1 The actual way in which to reflect in general

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.2.1.1.2 Reflecting on the individual divisions of karma

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

As we mentioned earlier, the topic is in relation to how to engage in the practice. It was explained that the way to engage in the practice is, first to distinguish between what is virtuous and what is non-virtuous. Then, having made the distinction between virtuous and non-virtuous deeds, we adopt the virtuous ones and abandon the negative deeds. This is what is called engaging in the practice.

Earlier, we identified the virtuous and non-virtuous deeds with the 10 virtuous deeds (to be practised), and the 10 non-virtuous deeds (to be avoided).

The next subdivision in the text is resolving karma and its effect. This has three further subdivisions:

- black karma and its effect
- white karma and its effect
- presenting other divisions of karma.

The subdivision on black karma and its effect is further subdivided into three:

- the actual path of black karma
- the feature of the weight of black karmas
- the effect of the black karmas.

In relation to the actual path of black karma, when we consider the 10 non-virtuous deeds, the first is the non-virtuous act of killing. The actual path of black karma in relation to killing would be the negative act of killing.

Four ‘modes’ have to be intact for the complete path of killing to take effect. All the 10 non-virtues we mentioned earlier are based on harming others. Therefore, one easy way to distinguish whether an action is negative or not is to see whether it brings harm to others or not. When it’s a violent action, which means an act which brings harm to others, one can conclude that it is a negative action.

Another explanation or definition of what makes a negative karmic path, is whether the action is a cause to bring about an undesirable experience in an undesirable realm in the future. So it is called a ‘path’ of black karma, because it leads to the lower realms. So the path of negative karma relates to the combination of that which brings about an undesirable result, and that which leads to lower realms. In this way, we can identify what actually is a negative karma or the path of negative karma.

The practical way of defining negative karma is that which brings harm to others, which engages in violent actions towards others. We can identify the opposite of that, which would be non-violence. A non-violent act would be a virtuous act, so when we practise non-violence, we are deciding not to harm others in any intentional way that we can avoid. Refraining from harming others in itself becomes a great practice.

Imagine a society or a family where people have decided not to harm each other. Such a family, community or nation would naturally be very peaceful. Therefore, Buddhism can be described as a religion or doctrine based on non-violence. When we talk about world peace, this is also based on non-violence. When people refrain from violence, peace comes as a natural result.

Leaving aside very high level esoteric practices, if we can decide to adopt something as simple as deciding not to harm others, intentionally not harming others to the best of our ability, this itself becomes a profound practice, a good practice, the benefit of which can be experienced right away. This is why I keep emphasising that this practice cannot be underestimated. It is definitely something we can practise in our everyday life, beginning right now: we can definitely decide to do this practice.

Having mentioned that non-violence is the basic practice, we then look at what non-violence is based on, which is love and compassion. As we develop love and compassion, the wish to refrain from violence and not harming others, will follow naturally. So the real basis of non-violence is love and compassion.

As we said earlier, to engage in the complete act of negative karma such as killing, four modes or components have to be intact:

- the basis
- the attitude
- the actual performance or the action
- the culmination or completion of the act.

The basis is defined as a sentient being other than oneself, which is living.

The attitude is subdivided into a further three parts:

- discrimination or perception
- the affliction
- the motivation.

The discrimination or perception means having the correct perception (or recognition) of the intended object of harm. For the act of killing, one must have a correct perception of the person or being one intends to kill. In other words, for the karma to be complete, one has to unmistakably recognise that it is another being or person that will be killed – a particular person or being. This discrimination has to be unmistakable. If the intention were to kill whatever one came into contact with, one would not have to have this unmistakable discrimination because of the fact of already having an attitude of killing anything one comes into contact with.

There are four different types of discrimination in this context. Among these four different perceptions, two are said to be correct perceptions, and two faulty:

- perceiving a living being to be a living being - a correct perception
- perceiving a living being not to be a living being – a faulty perception
- perceiving what is not a living being not to be a living being - a correct perception
- perceiving what is not a living being to be a living being. - a faulty perception.

The second part of the attitude is the affliction, which includes attachment, anger and ignorance. For example, killing another living being for its flesh or skin would be killing done out of attachment. Killing an enemy would be an example of killing out of anger. Killing a being without any sense of remorse, or with an attitude that there are no negative consequences, would be killing out of ignorance. Also killing beings for fun or sport, thinking that no harm has been inflicted on them would be killing out of ignorance.

Some cultures believe that making animal sacrifices is good, but that is in fact an act of killing out of ignorance. Unfortunately, there are still people and tribes who practise animal sacrifice in some remote parts of India and Nepal. It's a strange phenomenon that they do on a regular basis. They think that if they were to stop carrying out animal sacrifice, some spirit would harm them, even if they wanted to stop it.

Understanding this, at one of the Kalachakra teachings in Bodhgaya some years ago, His Holiness the Dalai Lama advised people who come from the two border regions around the Himalayas to stop their practice of sacrifice when they returned home. He advised them to say in front of their spirits or gods on the altars where they normally made the sacrifice that they were not going to offer any more sacrifices, because they wanted to follow the advice of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. His Holiness told them they could just say to the spirit: "The Dalai Lama told me not to do these sacrifices, so I'm going to stop", and then it would be OK.

Geshe-la heard later that certain people from those areas who had stopped engaging in that sacrificial acts said that nothing bad had happened after that: it was OK.

The third part of the attitude is the motivation, which is said to be an unceasing motivation of the wish to kill – one has to maintain the motivation of wishing to kill until the act is completed.

The third of the four modes or components is the performance of the act, which in this case is the act of killing. The act of killing is described as the actual taking of life of the other living being, either by oneself or through one's order to kill. If you order someone else to kill on your behalf, this would be considered as your own action. Even though you did not do the killing personally, because you gave the order to kill, when that

act of killing is performed, it is equivalent of you committing the action.

The means that contributes to the taking of the life of the other living being would be included in that act, such as using a weapon like a knife, gun, or any another means of killing such as with poison.

If an act of killing is done by a group – for example, if five people engaged in an act of killing and only one did the actual killing – when the other being is killed, because all five people had agreed to engage in that killing act, all five equally get the negative karma of killing. Even though it was completed by one person, because all five were involved, they all get the same karma of killing.

The fourth of the four modes or components is the culmination or completion of the act. Because of the means, when the other being's life force comes to an end – which means when their breath stops and they actually die – this is when the completion takes place.

For completion to take place, the living being one has intended to kill must die before the one who performs the act of killing. If the killer dies before the being that is to be killed, the killer will not have completed the full four modes of the negative karma of killing, as completion has not taken place. Likewise, if the killer and the being to be killed die at the same time, the killer will also not have received the full negative karma of killing, as the completion has not occurred.

By this definition, someone who takes their own life, who commits suicide, will not incur the completion of the act of killing, as they will have died before the completion of the act. In the case of suicide, although the two of other modes of karma would have been intact – the attitude and the performance, the act of taking life – the completion would not be there because in order for the completion to take place, the being has to die before oneself. One cannot die before oneself, because in this case the object is oneself. Also the basis would not be complete because, as you may remember, the basis has to be a living being other than oneself.

We can conclude this evening with meditation, focusing this time on the mantra. As mentioned earlier, sit in an upright, comfortable position and bring your mind inward.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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