
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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We will spend some minutes in meditation. It is important to sit in a comfortable but upright position.

The Tibetan word for meditation is *gom*, which means familiarising the mind with a virtuous object you have chosen to focus on and trying to maintain a single-pointed focus on that object. As we become more familiar with meditation by focusing our mind on a virtuous object, the mind becomes more calm, rested and peaceful. However, for beginners, it initially seems quite difficult to even allocate some time for meditation. Then, even when we try to meditate, keeping the mind focused seems very difficult.

When we hear about the benefits of meditation we may agree that, yes, meditation is definitely very useful and that we need to do it, but we may also think that it is too difficult and that we cannot do it. It is important to understand why we regard it as difficult, rather than just leaving it at that. Why do we see it as difficult to meditate, to keep the mind focused on a virtuous object? The answer is that our mind is already familiarised with being distracted by worldly objects, and because the mind is so used to that, when we try to focus it inward, it appears very difficult. However, although meditation may seem difficult initially, we must first understand that it is definitely possible for us to be able to focus the mind inward on a virtuous object. Even in the short-term, when we are able to maintain our focus on a virtuous object, we will experience some mental calm and peace.

At the moment, our mind is effortlessly and spontaneously distracted by worldly objects because we have familiarised our mind in this way for a long time. Similarly, when we continually try to bring our mind inward and focus on a virtuous object, over time and with more familiarity, we will reach a point where focusing inward on a virtuous object will become spontaneous and effortless.

It is very important not to lose our enthusiasm and courage and to maintain our practice, because the reason we become discouraged is that we tend to forget the reality of the situation; we tend to focus on the difficulties and just give up. We must constantly remind ourselves that it is possible for us to train our mind to be focussed through familiarity. Thinking about this possibility should bring back our enthusiasm.

Different individuals may find that different types of obstacles distract their minds from focusing on a virtuous object. Some delusions may be stronger for some individuals, or the same person might be distracted by

different delusions at different times. For example, sometimes we may be strongly attached to certain external worldly objects, causing the mind to easily lose its focus on a virtuous object. At other times or for other individuals, it may be anger that distracts the mind; for others, it may be jealousy or pride. It is important to identify which particular delusions are causes of distraction for you.

Once we identify which delusion is distracting our mind, we must then try to combat that particular delusion. For example, when attachment is very strong in the mind, it definitely obstructs our mental focus. If we try to spend even a few moments focusing our mind on a virtuous object, as soon as we remember the object of attachment, the attachment starts to overpower the mind to the point where the mind becomes completely distracted. Although physically we may appear to be meditating with a good posture, inside our mind is distracted and cannot remain focussed on the virtuous object.

The particular antidote for overcoming attachment, as explained in the teachings, is to try to see the false nature of the object of attachment. Attachment is a state of mind where we exaggerate the attractive characteristics of the object. Now we must develop the opposite state of mind, where we look at the unattractive aspects of that object. As we focus on the reality of the unattractive aspects or characteristics of the object, the intensity of the attachment towards the object will be reduced. In this way, we can slowly bring the mind of attachment to a more neutral state, and train our mind to overcome that strong negative influence. This is also true for the other delusions that arise in the mind – you can use the appropriate antidote to overcome the particular delusion.

As we deal with the delusions such as attachment and anger individually, we can then investigate further into where the delusions come from. Then it will become clear to us that the delusions arise within us because of the strong sense of grasping to a self – what we call “I” or “me”. As long as there is strong grasping to the “I”, attachment towards those things that are favourable to the “I” will arise naturally, as will anger or aversion towards those things that are not favourable to the “I”. Because attachment and anger arise from that initial strong sense of “me” or “I”, we must investigate how and why we grasp at this “I”. When we encounter something favourable to the “I”, attachment arises in the mind; if we meet something unfavourable to the “I”, aversion or anger arises in the mind. We come to realise that in relation to the “I” or the self there is the mental state that produces attachment to the outer desirable object, and aversion or anger to objects we do not desire.

As we find out that this is how the process occurs, we begin to also realise that there are opposites of those negative states of mind. The opposite to attachment is detachment, and the opposite to anger is love and compassion. Just as the mind produces attachment and anger, so too does it produce the positive states of mind – detachment, contentment, love and compassion – which are developed within our own mind.

When we identify with the positive states of mind, we come to realise that when such states of mind are present, we experience a sense of wellbeing, peace and tranquillity in the mind. Having identified these positive states of mind, we use them as an object of our meditation, familiarising the mind with these and other virtuous states of mind. As we familiarise the mind more and more with these positive states, it becomes more and more peaceful and calm and when this influence becomes stronger, we will experience real peace of mind.

Once we spend some time in meditation and relate to our life situation, it becomes interesting to watch ourselves and how we deal with life. We may see an object and might initially feel that we are developing some sort of love and compassion towards it. But then we start to realise that this feeling is more like attachment; we find that we start becoming disappointed and getting hurt by that object we felt compassion for, and we come to realise that it was more attachment than love that we felt.

As we train our mind, we will be more able to distinguish between attachment and real love and compassion. It is important that we really look into our state of mind, making sure that we try to reduce the delusions, such as attachment, and enhance the positive states of mind, such as real compassion and love. Through this process, we come to realise that if we let our mind to be influenced by attachment and the other delusions, this will only bring about more frustration and confusion, whereas if we train in enhancing our positive states of mind – by identifying them and putting effort into stabilising them – our mind will become much more tranquil.

Therefore in our daily life, we need to put the positive states of mind into practice and, as soon as negative states of mind arise, try to identify them and reduce them. We begin this practice towards those with whom we associate closely in our daily life, such as our family or partners, not with strangers or some alien object. The people we have to deal with in our everyday life are the very people with whom we need to practice tolerance, patience, love and compassion with. If we feel strong anger and attachment in the mind, we must try to identify it.

Of course, there may be some contributing condition associated with the other person to cause anger or attachment to arise in our mind, but ultimately the cause is within our own mind. We must control our mind and identify the delusions as they arise; even if the object does serve as a condition, it is just a secondary or contributing factor. The real contributing factor for the delusions to arise is our own attitude. If we train our mind to the point where we have control over it so that it is not completely influenced by the delusions – through familiarising it with detachment, love and compassion – then even if others contribute to making us upset or making us feel attachment, our mind can be stable and not be overwhelmed by the external conditions.

How do we gain control over our own mind and overcome the delusions? It is through meditation. With this understanding, we can now spend a few minutes

keeping our mind focused on a virtuous object.

The reason why we initially focus on the breath in our meditation training is because it is a neutral object. Furthermore, there is a specific benefit in focusing on the breath, because the subtle winds in the body are related to the mind. Keeping the mind focused on the breath allows the mind to settle down. The reason why we cannot immediately focus on a virtuous object is that our beginner's mind is completely distracted by worldly objects. It is very difficult to bring a completely distracted mind to focus immediately onto a virtuous object. This technique of focusing on the breath is presented as a means of settling down that very distracted mind that is completely filled with different conceptual thoughts. The breathing process is something we do all the time, so by focusing on it 100%, we can reduce the conceptual thoughts and settle the mind. As we train our mind to focus on the breath, and as it becomes more settled, we can use that state of mind to focus on a virtuous object and train our mind in virtue. Therefore, this is a very practical technique to settle the mind. (*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

We will continue with the topic from the last session on the ten non-virtuous deeds, the second of which is stealing.

For stealing to be a complete karmic action, as mentioned earlier, four conditions must be present: the basis, the attitude, the performance and the culmination or completion of the act. We mentioned quite a few of these last time. To go over them again, in order for an act of stealing to be complete, the basis has to be present. The basis is an object that belongs to someone else. The attitude is composed of three parts: discrimination or perception, the affliction and the motivation. The motivation is the thought of wishing to take something that belongs to someone else. The discrimination or perception is perceiving that the object one desires belongs to someone else.

There are three main types of affliction: attachment, anger and ignorance. An example of stealing with the primary delusion of attachment would be wishing to steal an object that belongs to someone else, being obsessed with the thought that that object is really

beautiful or nice and that one must have it. An example of anger as being the main delusion for stealing would be the case where one steals an object belonging to a so-called enemy, a person that one dislikes, mainly to cause them pain. An example of stealing from a delusion of ignorance is to have the thought: "It's okay, there is no fault, there is no negative karma or consequence in taking something from someone else". With that state of mind, there is no sense of discriminating between right and wrong. For example, if one is lacking money, one may think that it's okay to take money from someone who has plenty of money, thinking it's OK.

The performance means the action of stealing, which can either be through an obvious way or a devious and quiet way, like a cat trying to steal something – they move very quietly and unobtrusively. Or, it could be like 'daylight robbery' where we go about in broad daylight with weapons and so forth using force to take something that does not belong to us. Either way, actually obtaining that object would be the performance.

The culmination of the deed is when, having engaged in the performance of obtaining the object, one actually decides in one's mind: "I have now obtained this object and it belongs to me". When one has that thought, the action is complete. There might even be a sense of accomplishment, and you may feel proud and happy about it.

So when all four factors are present in any one act of stealing, that act of stealing becomes a complete act of stealing. There are cases where an act of stealing is done but where some of the factors are missing, such as not having a negative motivation, or not having a strong delusion in the mind, or halfway through the act not completing it. In these cases, a partial act of stealing may occur, but not the complete action. The full karmic path of stealing would not have been committed.

It seems that we are coming to the end of our time for the session, but we could have some time for questions if you have any.

Question: I've heard Geshe-la talk about how countries can have negative karma and I thought about countries which take over other countries and if this is a form of stealing. If there are places which can have negative karma, would that then imply that a country taking another country over, like having war against another country and conquering the other country, would that be an act of stealing? Would that create negative karma in the region?

Answer: In relation to the earlier reference you mentioned, Geshe-la feels that it might have been a time when he was explaining about how, in order to enjoy the good things in a country – Geshe-la remembers he was using himself as an example – for him to come to Australia to enjoy the good environment here, there is a partial karma he had to create in order to experience the group karma of Australians who enjoy the good country here. He would have had to create some karma to experience the group karma of Australians, who experience a good country. I don't know if that is clear, but that's how Geshe-la had referred to it earlier.

In any case, the situation you mentioned would be a case of negative karma in relation to the people who live in the country. If a certain country attacks another nation and conquers it, that would be like an act of stealing on the part of the country that goes out of its way to inflict harm on another country. The people in the conquering country create the group karma of stealing – that would be the case. I don't know if that relates to your question or not.

Question: The group karma in Australia shouldn't be that good because of the way we treated the Aborigines, but yet we are meant to be the luckiest country in the world.

Answer: Those who experience the good results of living in Australia now may not have been the individuals who actually inflicted that harm on Aborigines in the past. In fact, it was only a minority of people who inflicted harm on Aborigines in the past. If it was a separate minority of individuals who inflicted that harm previously, there is no reason why the majority of Australians now, who had nothing to do with that, need to experience a result now.

Even previously when those acts were done, Geshe-la feels that it would not have been the case that the majority of Australians at that time would have agreed to it. If there had been a general consensus as to whether to engage in that act or not, the common people may not have favoured that. Rather, the situation at that time was that the authorities abused their power and inflicted harm upon others, in this case, Aborigines. The authorities of that time were a minority and used their power to inflict that harm. But I don't think they had the general consent of all the people who lived here at that time.

Question: What is the best way to maintain one's enthusiasm and motivation in one's meditation practice?

Answer: Of course that question arises after one has already seen the benefits of meditation and wishes to meditate. Based on that wish to meditate, the best way to develop a good motivation and determination and to first of all try to bring the mind into a neutral state. From a very distracted state, it is hard to generate a good motivation because the mind is very busy. To have a good motivation, one needs to first bring the mind into neutral state, which is done through the practice we have done earlier, focusing on the breath.

It is mentioned in the teachings that if one completely focuses on the breath for at least 21 rounds, during that process the mind will settle down and become like clear glass with no stains on it. Right now, our mind is like dirty glass – it is not very clear! So for our mind to be stainless and clear, we focus it on the breath and bring it to a neutral state. When it becomes clear, to use another analogy, it will be like a white cloth. With a white cloth, you can use any dye to colour it – red, blue or whatever colour you wish for. Similarly, when the mind abides in a neutral state, it's like clear glass or white cloth, from where we can direct it into a virtuous state. When the mind attains a neutral state, we can use it for developing a very good, strong motivation, and enthusiasm will arise from there; then real meditation can start from that

neutral state of mind.

We can end the session for this evening. As before, we will spend some time before ending our session in meditation, this time focusing on the mantra of Buddha Shakyamuni. Again sit in an upright, comfortable position and keep the mind focused on the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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