

---

## The Condensed Lam Rim

༄༅། །བྱུང་ཚུབ་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བཞུགས་སོ། །

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

21 June 2006

---

As usual, it's good to spend some time for meditation. We will sit in a comfortable and relaxed position.

As the teacher Buddha Shakyamuni said, one is one's own saviour. Who else is there to save oneself? Buddha Shakyamuni's advice about oneself being one's own saviour or protector refers to our state of our mind – our experiences depend on the attitudes that we have in our mind, the karma we create in our mind. Therefore, as we each have the capacity to completely control our mind, as the Buddha has said, we are our own saviour or protector.

To further elaborate on the Buddha's statement, the happiness or suffering we experience comes from our mind. It's not that there are no external conditions contributing to our happiness or suffering; there are certain external conditions that contribute, but the main cause of our happiness or suffering lies within our own mind, the attitudes we have in our mind.

So, to experience happiness, we need to eliminate the causes of suffering within our mind. As long as we have the causes of suffering in our mind, we will experience suffering, which will then oppose a happy state of mind. As we accumulate more causes of happiness within our mind and abandon the causes of suffering, to the extent we do this, our mind will become much happier. This is how our own happiness depends on our state of mind, and how our state of mind depends on how we shape it.

To further analyse the statement about how our happiness and suffering depend on the training of our mind, we can take some examples from our daily lives. Even in a worldly sense, when we talk about achieving something, such as knowledge, it is clear that in order to make a good living, we need to have a good job, acquire possessions and so forth; this is mostly dependent on whether we have a good education, and have acquired some good knowledge.

How do we acquire that knowledge? It is through training the mind. We acquire the knowledge by training the mind to learn, and as we learn, we gain more knowledge, which then gives us more skills, and more material gain and status. Gaining a reputation as an important person – a politician or whatever it may be – is achieved through the effort of training the mind. So even in worldly life, everything is achieved through the mind – thinking, learning, motivation, and the courage and determination to achieve something.

When we look at these practical examples of how everything is related initially to the attitude of the mind, the Buddha's teachings that explain how one's happiness

and suffering depend on the mind start to make more sense. Further, when the teaching states that it depends on one's karma, it makes even more sense.

It is difficult for us initially to completely understand or accept the concept that what we achieve in this life depends on the karma we have created in our past lives, and also that what we will experience in our future lives depends on the karma we create in this life. At the moment, we don't have the knowledge, we cannot see our past lives, but we can definitely relate to the practical examples in this life from our own experience. We all have the experience of how our achievements and the achievements of others depend on our attitudes, on the working of the mind.

So even if we don't fully understand the more difficult aspects of karma right now, if we could just relate to the fact that, even in this life, the happiness and suffering that we experience every day depends on the mind, this should be reason enough for us to start training the mind and to put some effort into gaining some real happiness and eliminating suffering on a day to day basis. If we attempted to do this, it would be of great benefit to us.

To eliminate faults and acquire qualities within the mind, we must constantly guard the mind with conscientiousness. We guard the mind through meditation, keeping it focused on a virtuous object. The main tools we use to keep the mind focused on a virtuous object are known as 'mindfulness' and 'introspection.

Mindfulness and introspection help keep the mind focused on a virtuous object. We should try to constantly maintain a virtuous frame of mind through which we acquire qualities and abandon faults. Applying this in meditation is a more advanced stage in our practice, however when we relate the importance of guarding the mind, even from a relatively mundane point of view, we can clearly see that it is applicable even in our daily life.

For example, young people need to study to get a good education so that they can shape the future of their life. To do well in their studies, they must be able to focus their minds. Whether one is in class or whether one is studying alone, the mind needs to be focused. If the mind is constantly distracted by other kinds of thoughts – especially attachment or desire towards certain objects or pleasurable ideas and so forth – it is clear that the study will not be very good, as the mind is not focused.

This is also true for your job and other everyday situations. If the mind is not focused, you will not get a good result from whatever you are doing. Your studies or your job or whatever you do will not be fruitful. This is something we should check into and see whether it is true or not, even at a practical day to day level. It's easy to say: "Oh, no, I can study. Even if I'm distracted, it's fine", but when you really think about it, is it true or not? Can you really remain focused and learn the subject well when the mind is distracted? This is something you can see from your own experience and see clearly in others' lives – if the mind is distracted, it is not possible to learn well.

We can relate these practical examples from daily life to

---

---

our meditation practice. Although the focus we apply to our worldly studies would not be considered meditation, the same principle applies to our spiritual practice and meditation – in fact it is even more important for the mind to remain focused in meditation. It is only with a focused mind that we can progress in our meditation and gain some results.

Coming back to the main points, as mentioned earlier, from the Buddha's advice we can see that it is very important to guard the mind – to protect it from faults and to acquire virtues or qualities. The main tools for guarding the mind and keeping it focused on a virtuous object in meditation are mindfulness and introspection. Mindfulness keeps the mind focused on the object, while introspection is the state of mind that investigates and makes sure the mind does not wander away from the object.

With these tools of mindfulness and introspection, we can keep the mind focused on the virtuous object. We should train in this way from the very beginning. Even if it's only for a short time, if we do our meditation with complete attention and focus, this will become a habit. We will slowly progress in a steady but sure way, and gain some results from our meditation. Otherwise, even if we spend quite a long time, say half an hour or so, in meditation, sitting physically still and with a good posture, if we don't check up on our mind, it could be become distracted. If we allow the mind to get into the habit of always being distracted, we will never get a good result from meditation.

Again, using the mundane example of study, if we just do it half-heartedly from the very beginning, the study seems to become more and more of an obligation. Every time you try to study, you don't gain much from it, and the topics seem to become more difficult and harder to follow. At a certain point, you might just completely give up the study. This is how people become dropouts from school or college or whatever. Whereas those who are quite determined – who keep going for whatever duration they have set out to study, and who study well with a focused mind – will succeed in their studies.

It is exactly the same for meditation. We should start off with determination – for whatever duration of time we choose to meditate, even if it's a short time, we try to keep our full attention focused on the object during that time, using mindfulness and introspection. In this way, the mind slowly, definitely becomes more accustomed to meditation, which becomes easier and more enjoyable, so we will definitely get the results as time goes by.

The main point is to guard the mind. A successful meditation depends on guarding the mind, and we do that with mindfulness and introspection. Here, guarding the mind means guarding it from external distractions. Our mind is habituated to being completely distracted most of the time, so here we make the decision to keep our mind focused. For this duration of time, we are training our mind to focus on the natural inflow and outflow of our breath, guarding our mind not to be distracted from any conceptual thoughts that may arise. As soon as they arise, we just bring our focus back onto

the breath. In this way, we will spend some minutes completely focused on the breath. (*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 our last session, we covered the four conditions needed for a complete act of stealing to occur. So, I think we can consider having completed the explanation of stealing from the ten non-virtuous deeds.

The third of the ten non-virtuous deeds is sexual misconduct. Again, four conditions [the basis, attitude, performance and culmination] must be present for the act to be a complete act.

The first is the **basis** – this includes persons with whom one should not have intercourse, for example one's parents. For example, a man should not have intercourse with his mother or a girl who is underage or under the protection of others. In short, whatever would be considered as a legal offence under modern secular law would be included in this. Also having intercourse with ordained people would be sexual misconduct. There are also certain places considered improper for having sexual intercourse – such as where a lama or a teacher is residing, a monastery or holy place, or in front of statues.

There are also improper times during which sexual intercourse would become sexual misconduct, even if it is done with one's own spouse. For example, a man should not have intercourse with his wife when she's pregnant. Also if someone has decided to take the one-day layperson's vows, where they vow to abstain from having sexual intercourse for that day, it would be an inappropriate time for either this person or their spouse to deliberately insist on having intercourse.

The first part of the **attitude** (or intention) is the *perception* or recognition. For sexual misconduct to take place, there has to be an unmistakable perception that one is having intercourse with someone else's spouse. For example, thinking that the person was one's own spouse would be not a complete act of sexual misconduct. Discrimination has to be a clear identification of the object as being improper.

Another part of the intention is the *delusion* or affliction. Any of the three delusions may be present. Engaging in sexual misconduct out of attachment is an obvious one. Sexual misconduct can also be done out of anger as the main delusion. It can be done out of ignorance, such as engaging in sexual misconduct with the thought that it's OK, there's no harm done to anyone, and there's not

really a fault.

The third part of the intention is the *motivation*, which is an unceasing wish to engage in the act of the sexual misconduct.

The third condition is the **performance** (or deed), which occurs when one actually engages in the act of intercourse.

The fourth condition is the **culmination** (or final step), which occurs when you have met with the object and experienced the pleasure of orgasm.

When all four conditions – the basis, attitude, performance and culmination – are present, one will have engaged in the full path of sexual misconduct.

Of the ten non-virtuous deeds, the three relating to the physical body have been completed. Now there are four related to the speech, the first of which is called, the negative action of lying. At this point, are there any questions?

*Question: What is the Buddhist stance on homosexuality? The Catholics have a very negative approach, they say it's forbidden. What is the Buddhist position?*

*Answer:* Any action done out of attachment is considered a non-virtuous act; the Buddhist point of view is that an action done out of excessive attachment is a non-virtue. If you consider whether the deed itself is virtuous or non-virtuous, one would have to say that maybe it is a non-virtuous deed, more specifically, an act of what we call sexual misconduct.

*(Further exchange here between student, translator and Geshe Doga)*

*Translator:* I thought Geshe-la said 'action', but I think Geshe-la's saying 'man'.

*(More discussion)*

*Translator:* Sorry, I misunderstood. I can clarify now. If the action is between two men, it would be sexual misconduct. The Lam Rim is very specific about the physical body parts; if the sexual act is done with the improper parts, it would be sexual misconduct. The text specifies the parts, which was not mentioned earlier. The Lam Rim mentions that, even if sexual intercourse involves one's own spouse, if it is done with the improper parts, it would be regarded as sexual misconduct.

*Question: Isn't it also that in heterosexual sexual attraction, one would be attracted to certain parts of the body, so isn't it probable that any sexual attraction is based on attachment? Isn't it also sexual misconduct?*

*(Further exchange here for translator to clarify the question)*

*Translator:* Basically the question is whether a heterosexual relationship is sexual misconduct or not?

*(Another exchange between translator and students to clarify)*

*Translator:* So the question is whether attachment is sexual misconduct or not?

*(Further discussion)*

*Translator:*

The answer is, if sexual intercourse is with one's own spouse and does not involve improper parts, it would be

not sexual misconduct. Whether the relationship is heterosexual or homosexual and even if it the act involves one's own spouse, if the improper parts are used in sexual union, that would be sexual misconduct.

The main point here is to overcome attachment, and the Buddha's advice to his followers was that he did not condemn sexual intercourse entirely for laypeople. But while he gave this advice to laypeople who had not yet taken vows, his advice to his followers who wanted to train the mind in overcoming attachment was to refrain from sexual misconduct.

So for laypeople the Buddha did not condemn sexual relationship altogether, but advised them to refrain from sexual misconduct. But for those such as ordained persons who want to further train in overcoming attachment, the Buddha advised that they refrain from having sexual relationships altogether. In this way, the Buddha provided training for overcoming attachment in stages, from refraining from sexual misconduct, to refraining from having sexual intercourse altogether.

If the Buddha had advised all his followers not to engage in any sexual relationship, that would have been too much, they could not have handled it. Therefore, we can clearly see that the Buddha had very skilful ways: first advising to refrain from sexual misconduct, and then if one wants to further train one's mind in overcoming attachment, to refrain from sexual conduct entirely. This is a very skilful way to slowly lead an ordinary person through the stages of training the mind.

Even from a worldly point of view, we can see so many faults arising from sexual misconduct.

If you take the example of a husband and wife, if one of the partners engages in sexual misconduct and goes off with another person, the other partner will experience much suffering. There's so much mental pain and agony that the other partner feels. Therefore, it is very clear how sexual misconduct in a mutual relationship can bring harm, isn't it?

It is because sexual misconduct is a very harmful deed for oneself and others that the Buddha gave advice not to engage in sexual misconduct.

There could be a lot more discussion about this, but we don't have time, and it's maybe not appropriate right now. We will end here for this evening and focus on the mantra of Buddha Shakyamuni. As before, sit in a meditative posture, and keep the mind focused on Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed from tape by Gabrielle Thomson*

*Edit 1 by Mary-Lou Considine*

*Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe*

*Edited Version*

© **Tara Institute**