
The Condensed Lam Rim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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As usual it's good to spend some time in meditation. So please sit in a comfortable and upright position.

People engage in meditation for different purposes. However, for those of us wishing to follow the dharma, the goal of our meditation should be to increase our positive states of mind and decrease, and eventually eliminate, our negative states of mind. To achieve this, we need to be able to focus on what is positive and gradually eliminate what is negative from our mind. This should be the main purpose of our meditation.

Some people may engage in meditation to try and relax their mind. When we engage in worldly activities, we naturally wish to experience favourable circumstances and discard unfavourable ones. However, from a worldly perspective, there seems to be no end to the favourable conditions we must acquire, while unfavourable conditions seem to be plentiful. After many attempts to achieve what we want, we may reach the point of being overwhelmed by the situation. For example, in our work environment, we may be really overwhelmed by the situation and wish to withdraw from it and have a tranquil mind.

When we reach such a point of wishing to find a way to relax the mind, we may come into contact with meditation techniques and then try to meditate. Even if we wish to meditate with this attitude, it is still a beneficial way to approach meditation, because meditation does have that benefit of relaxing the mind.

For those who approach meditation because of having experienced difficulties in their work or family situations and wish to have a relaxed mind, as they begin to engage in meditation, if their technique is right, their meditation will take them much further than just experiencing a relaxed state of mind. They will actually start to generate a really happy and peaceful state of mind.

When a person initially comes to meditation wanting to have a calm, relaxed mind, and then they experience the results of meditation, they realise that there is more to be gained from it. Not only do they experience a relaxed, more contented state of mind than the earlier state of mind that was completely overwhelmed by worldly activities but, through their meditation, they also experience much more joy and happiness. Instead of being completely overwhelmed by, and dissatisfied with, their situation, through meditation their mind becomes quite stable, and they find that this is really what is most beneficial in their life. This is a good basis for them to continue their practice and get the full benefit of

meditation.

Others may approach meditation with the mere attitude, "My friend is going to meditation, so I might as well go and try it out myself". Even with this attitude, it may turn out that you really get interested in meditation and further develop yourself. However, if your interest was merely based on a fleeting interest, after a few days and attempts it might be too easy to give it up entirely.

In either case, the real purpose of regular meditation is to develop a steady mind and focus it on virtuous activities, which results in a really happy and peaceful mind. That is the main purpose of meditation.

If we approach meditation with an attitude of wishing to develop a steady, firm mind, along with good mental qualities such as having a kind attitude towards others, then when we achieve these results, it will also bring satisfaction to those close to us, such as our parents. Initially your parents may be a bit wary about you approaching a different religion or spiritual path and be reluctant about their child going to meditation. However, when they can see and appreciate the positive qualities you have developed as a result of meditation, they will feel grateful that their child is happy.

Even though they are not able to meditate themselves or may not understand fully what it is all about, when they see their child happy, that will bring joy in their mind and make them feel happy. Developing a positive and loving attitude towards your parents and others is a quality that can definitely be appreciated by those around you.

The teachings advise that, as a measure of your progress in meditation, you should experience an obvious decrease in delusions or negative state of mind such as anger, attachment, excessive desire and pride. This means that if someone had been quite short-tempered, then after having done meditation, they would have become more relaxed and not as easily provoked or irritated. And someone who had once had a lot of pride, after having done meditation, would have less pride and more humility. These are the results that should come about from attempting to do meditation.

Reducing the delusions in your mind is something that will be noticed by all. Meditation brings the mind to a much more open state. As you say in English, it is important to have an open, easy-going mind rather than a closed mind. This is definitely achieved as a result of reducing delusions in the mind.

For example, the negative state of mind of jealousy brings so much discomfort to the mind. Jealousy is a mind that is unhappy about others' success. As long as our mind is in a state of jealousy, there will be many reasons for us to be unhappy, because there are so many people around who are successful. Every time we meet others who are doing well and are successful, it will just make us unhappy; the mind will become closed and tense.

But when we meditate and attempt to bring the mind inward and develop a positive state of mind, we will reduce our jealousy, allowing the mind to naturally

become more joyous and happy. Then, even if the external conditions to make us feel jealous are still there – others who are successful or who are doing better than us – they will no longer affect our mind. This would be a positive outcome of meditation: even when the conditions are present, they would not influence us.

As we bring the mind inward and focus it, we also become more in tune with it. We begin to really see how the mind works. We are able to distinguish between positive and negative states of mind. Having identified the positive and negative states of minds within us, we then try to slowly eliminate the negative states of mind and develop the positive ones. So just bringing the mind inward and focusing on one particular object helps to increase our understanding of ourselves, of our own mind.

Now, as we attempt to do a few minutes of meditation, we sit in a comfortable upright position again and generate a positive motivation for doing meditation. We withdraw our mind from external thoughts and distractions and try to focus it 100% on the meditation object. The object we are meditating on here is our breath; as the teachings advise, we keep our mind single-pointedly focused on the breath.

In lay terms, ‘single-pointedly’ means not thinking about anything else except the object, which here is the breath. We put our full attention on the natural inflow and outflow of our breath and just completely focus on that natural inflow and outflow of breath. When the mind starts to wander, we constantly try to bring it back onto the breath. If we allow the mind to follow other thoughts, we will completely lose our focus on the object, our breath. Therefore the attempt here is to bring our mind constantly back onto the breath and maintain its focus there. *(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 have covered in the text so far the ten non-virtuous actions, explaining them in detail.

Now the text explains the effects or results that we would experience if we were to engage in the ten non-virtuous deeds. This is in accordance to the need for us to understand why we should refrain from negative deeds. When a certain deed or action has been explained as being non-virtuous, naturally we think, “But what would be wrong if I did engage in that? What would the

outcome be?”.

Therefore the teachings explain in detail what results we would experience if we were to engage in negative deeds. By understanding the results of our negative actions, we will avoid engaging in them so that we do not experience the results. When the advice is given in teachings to adopt the virtues and avoid negative karmas, this advice is given to those who have some inclination towards or belief in the law of cause and effect, or karma.

Let’s take the example of farmers. When farmers sow seeds in the ground, they sow the seed with the belief that it will produce a good harvest. If farmers didn’t believe this, they wouldn’t even attempt to sow the seed. Of course, there may be circumstances that would prevent a good harvest, such as lack of rain or the ground not being fertile. But generally, if the conditions are right, farmers believe that by planting the seed, they will get a good harvest.

It is similar with karma. If we use the analogy of the farmer and the sowing of the seed to explain karma, when we engage in a virtuous karma, such as abandoning the negative deed of killing, as the teachings explain the voluntarily avoidance of the negative action of killing will bring about a positive result, such as having a healthy life in the future, with beautiful features and so forth. So when we hear about the positive results that we can enjoy in the future, it will encourage us to engage in that positive deed.

However, having engaged in a positive deed such as avoiding killing, that virtuous action can then be obstructed by an opposing factor such as anger. It is said that if one develops strong anger, any positive deeds one does may not bring a good result. This is similar to the farmer. Even if the farmer wished for a good result, if the conditions were not right – if it were raining too hard or not raining at all – this would hinder the harvest.

On the other hand, as the teachings explain, if we engage in the act of killing, which is a negative karma, the natural result would be to experience negative consequences for oneself in the future, such as one’s own life being shortened and having a lot of sickness. But even a negative deed can be hindered through opposing forces. That is how the analogy of farmers sowing crops is used to explain karma.

The conviction we develop in the law of karma should be based on an understanding of how negative deeds bring about unfavourable results, and how voluntarily engaging in positive karmas or deeds brings about favourable conditions or consequences for ourselves in the future. The text explains in great detail the various positive and negative karmas and their corresponding results. As we further contemplate this advice, it should instil within us a wish to really develop ourselves so that we always try to minimise negative deeds to avoid negative consequences in the future, and to try to increase positive deeds.

It is said that as we develop conviction in karma, we also need to gradually develop the discriminating wisdom that knows what is positive and what is negative karma.

With that intelligence, we can naturally avoid negative actions and engage in creating positive karma.

We can judge whether our actions are good or bad by our state of mind. By engaging in negative deeds, we can immediately develop a negative state of mind; we can have an immediate experience of unsettled, unhappy mind. For example, attachment, anger and jealousy are said to be negative states of mind and by following these state of mind, we will engage in negative actions.

When the negative mind arises within us, what kind of experience do we have? When anger, for example, arises in the mind, do we feel happy, content and peaceful or not? This is something we will be able to identify immediately. Likewise when we have a jealous mind, do we feel relaxed, calm and peaceful or not?

On the positive side, when we have detachment and are not too concerned about worldly things – when we have a bit of contentment in our mind – does that bring about a happy mind or not? Likewise if we are free from jealousy, again we can see how our mind is more calm and peaceful. We can use our immediate experience as a gauge: we can see that if a certain state of mind brings immediate discomfort, then naturally by engaging in any subsequent negative deeds, we would experience negativities in the future as well.

The reason why the teachings explain the negative results for our future lives is because the negative consequences we experience now are obvious to us; that does not need much detailed explanation, as it is apparent from our own experience. However, it is not only now but also in our future lifetimes that we will experience discomfort and unease. Therefore, because a negative action has negative consequences immediately as well as in the future, it is worthwhile to try to overcome the negativities within one's mind and avoid engaging in negative actions.

With this explanation, it would make sense to us when the teachings talk about how, by engaging in a virtuous state of mind, we would have a good result, and by engaging in negative actions, we would experience negative results. That makes more sense now, doesn't it? Does any one have questions?

Question: How does one stop oneself from falling asleep in meditation?

Answer: There are different practical measures in trying to avoid a sleepy mind. Particularly if you're doing a long period of meditation, the advice is that is good to sometimes stop for awhile, look up and open one's eyes wide; looking around should clear the mind a bit. There is also some advice that if one were doing prolonged meditation, one could rinse one's face with cold water and that would refresh one.

For those attempting to do really long meditations to achieve what we call calm abiding, you could put something cold around your forehead and eyes to keep you awake and stop your eyes shutting in sleep.

If these practical measures do not work while you are sitting, it is advised that you take a break, go for a short

walk outside, in the fresh air, then come back and restart again. You should not be too stubborn and unrelenting.

Actually, if your formal meditation doesn't seem to work and you keep falling asleep, if you keep trying too hard, it might make you develop a more negative state of mind. It is in fact better to have a happy mind, to generate a virtuous state of mind and actually go to bed. Then, as mentioned in the teachings, one's sleep will be virtuous.

Question: Could I try to meditate standing up?

Answer: In fact there is technique of standing meditation where there is a rope strung across the room with a smaller rope coming down from it, and you hold onto that rope and follow the long rope up and down the room. Maybe this is an attempt to protect the meditators from stumbling over if they fall asleep! (*Laughter*) But apparently there is this technique of meditation.

Geshe-la was trying to say that if one fell down meditating, one would injure one's head. It would be quite absurd if you wounded your head and people asked: "How did you get that wound – did you have a fight with someone?" and you replied: "No, I was just meditating"! (*More laughter*)

(Translator) I suppose that's also another technique – just to laugh a bit!

(Geshe la continues) Some of you have noticed that during teachings you may fall asleep. Actually in the monastery during our classes, there would be monks who fall asleep and their heads then dropped backwards. It can be quite dangerous for the neck, you know, if you are trying to sit upright and your head keeps falling backward. Sometimes it damages the neck you know.

We will spend our last few minutes in meditation again. As mentioned earlier, try to bring the mind inward, sit in a comfortable upright position and focus on the mantra of Buddha Shakyamuni.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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