
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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Seat yourself in an upright and relaxed position. As most people would know, you keep your body in a relaxed and upright position. The purpose of meditation is to familiarise the mind particularly with a good way of thinking. In this way, as the mind is familiarised with a good way of thinking, it naturally produces good behaviour in our physical body. As the mind becomes focused on good or, more specifically, virtuous thoughts it naturally becomes kinder. In this way the mind becomes much firmer and more stable as well as kinder.

One must think about the benefits of having a focused, clear mind. How can that benefit us in our practical, daily life? If we think about this in practical terms we can see that if we are able to attain or achieve something that we desire it generally brings us a sense of joy and accomplishment, doesn't it? However, if something occurs which we do not desire this brings about sadness or an unpleasant feeling in our mind.

There are times when we accomplish something that we wish for and we seem to experience a sense of joy and happiness. If, however, the slightest things go wrong our mind may experience great sadness. In the course of our life we find that there are many instances where we go from one extreme to the other. Rather than a deep, real sense of inner joy, it's just a moment of excitement we feel when things seem to go well in life. Then, as soon as things don't seem to go our way and we experience some difficulties, we go to the other extreme of feeling completely overwhelmed and distraught. This may even lead to depression. Our mind is vulnerable to being either overly excited at one extreme or completely distraught at the other extreme. This occurs because the mind has not been trained to be firm and stable in whatever circumstances arise. Because the mind lacks a kind or a righteous attitude, when things seem to go well it goes into the extreme of becoming overly excited and, when things don't go well we become depressed.

When one develops a righteous mind and is able to distinguish and analyse the situation as it is in reality, the mind becomes stabilised and that sort of mind allows us to function in a normal way in whatever circumstances that may arise. For example, when things don't go well, rather than becoming distraught and completely overwhelmed one sees the advantages of dealing with the situation. One can actually train the mind to see the advantages of difficulties and opportunities.

(Editor's Note. The transcription was interrupted at this point by a power failure. During this period a short, single pointed meditation on the breath was conducted.)

Geshe-la feels that, for security reasons, it's better that we light some candles and people can have tea and just relax a bit.

Carrying on from earlier. It is the attitude that we have in our mind that allows us to experience different situations in different ways. When things don't seem to go well externally, if we have developed a mind that is stable and firm and can analyse the situation this can be seen as an advantage as well as just allowing the mind to be able to deal with the situation in an effective manner. The purpose of meditation is to develop a righteous mind. By focusing inward and then developing that stability further we can use the mind in the right direction.

When we look into, analyse, situations where one is unhappy or distraught we can find that it arises from not being satisfied with certain circumstances or situations. We are not satisfied and a lot of the time, because of this lack of contentment, we have over-exaggerated what we need, comfort-wise or emotionally. We over-exaggerate what we need to sustain us. Because our mind is discontented we allow all sorts of different desires to arise in the mind and we think that we need things or people and so forth in our life to sustain us. Then, to the extent that we focus on external objects as a means to sustain us, the mind becomes more and more dissatisfied.

We can come to realise that it is not external things that bring real satisfaction to the mind. Real satisfaction or contentment needs to arise from within oneself. When we look into situations where people are overly anxious we see that they become anxious because of desires they cannot fulfil and thus they lack sleep etc. We can see that when external circumstances are the same for a number of people that if one has a dissatisfied mind it makes the situation more uncomfortable. We can see this clearly, for example, in a family. While the rest of the family is doing OK, if someone within the family, such as the mother or father is not happy or content then, to the degree that they have a dissatisfied mind in whatever they feel they need and until they feel that need is fulfilled, they always have an anxious mind which can lead to lack of sleep. While everyone else is sleeping soundly, why is one person not sleeping well, even if the external situation is the same for everyone? That goes to show that it is really the internal attitude in the mind that brings about that anxiety or exaggerates the situation even if things are generally OK for everyone else. When one is suffering it is because of the attitude in the mind not being in tune. If one recognises that dissatisfied mind and recognises that it arises from excessive desire in the mind then one needs to begin to slowly overcome it and deal with the desires within ourselves.

To have a subdued mind means to be in control of the emotions that arise in the mind. If we want a contented, happy, joyful mind, then meditation can help us to achieve that. Therefore, meditation becomes important for us.

The great master, Lama Tsong Khapa, has mentioned that to have a subdued mind, one needs to avoid distractions and set one's mind to virtue. Do not harbour harmful

intentions within one's mind but instead develop kind intentions. Furthermore, one should listen to the sound advice of the teachings, and not stop at a merely hearing the teachings. One should use it for one's practice and apply it in meditation. That's how one subdues the mind. If we look into our own situation, we might find that we are actually practising the complete opposite of the teachings in many cases. Going back to the advice earlier, it seems that rather than abandoning distractions we pursue distractions. We purposely allow our minds to be influenced by the distractions and, rather than focusing on virtue, we seem to be focusing on all the desirous whims that arise in one's mind. Rather than generating kind intentions it seems that we harbour harmful intentions to others.

When we think further about the advice of Lama Tsong Khapa we find that it is actually very, very sound advice. When he says not to follow distraction, we can see that up until now most of our poor choices have come from following the distractions of our mind. These have led us into many complex and difficult situations in life. Furthermore, as he mentions, if we abandon negative states of mind and harmful intentions, and cultivate kind intentions towards others this becomes a real means for us to gain more happiness in our mind.

Lama Tsong Khapa also mentions that putting the teachings into practice basically falls into two main categories. These categories are: firstly to recognise the non-virtues and what is to be abandoned and, secondly, to recognise the virtues that are to be adopted. Abandoning the non-virtues or negative karmas and adopting virtuous karmas becomes the means for us to develop the mind and gain more wisdom. This then brings about real contentment and real happiness within one's mind. In this way, if we can really contemplate and try to follow the advice that has been given we can slowly begin to change our mind.

When we analyse further we begin to notice that what disturbs our mind is the non-virtuous actions that one engages in. Whatever non-virtue one may engage in has a natural consequence of disturbing our mind, and negative emotions arise in our mind as a consequence.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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