
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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It would be good to spend some time in meditation as usual. We will sit in a comfortable and upright position.

The definition of meditation is to keep the mind focused single-pointedly on an object by preventing it from wandering towards external objects. The main purpose of meditation is to gain control over the mind, to overcome the uncontrolled mind. Normally, we find that our mind is completely overwhelmed by worldly distractions.

The great master, Sakya Pandita, mentioned in one of his works, "*Having control over the mind is real freedom, whereas having an uncontrolled mind is a lack of freedom*". When we have control over our mind to the point where we can maintain our focus on any object of our choosing, we will have freedom from the distractions. By contrast, when the mind is so uncontrolled that it follows every whim or thought, this only brings us more misery and suffering. Sakya Pandita says that ultimate happiness is the controlled and subdued mind – this is definitely what we would consider as being real happiness. He also said, "*The best wealth is generosity, and the best friend is one that does not deceive us*". So the undecieving friend is the best friend.

Sakya Pandita's advice, particularly the line where he says that the ultimate happiness is the subdued and controlled mind, is sound advice for gaining real happiness in our life. Normally, we spend most of our time trying to gain some physical happiness or pleasure to do with the five senses. We are naturally inclined towards physical and sensual gratification. If someone did not know any better, it would be hard to blame them for not achieving happiness, because this is the only means they know. But when we look into it further, we find that pursuing physical and sensual gratification does not bring a real sense of contentment and happiness in the mind.

When we are introduced to meditation and attempt to focus our mind on a virtuous object, we find that the more we familiarise our mind with focusing on a virtuous object, the more contentment and peace we feel. Once we gain a real sense of contentment and happiness in the mind, this in turn will benefit our physical body. So it is not as though we are neglecting our body by focusing inward and training our mind. Some people may feel that when they do meditation, they are neglecting their physical happiness. In fact, meditation enhances our physical well being. Having a happy mind brings physical well being and happiness.

If we think about it, it is easier to do this than to try to attain happiness through accumulating material things. As we know from our daily life, we spend much time and energy in gaining material wealth, yet we still face so much difficulty, so many obstacles and hardships – for example, trying to please others, gaining wealth in devious ways, and so on. Basically, the pursuit of material wealth commonly causes the delusions to become stronger, which in turn brings

unhappiness to the mind. The stronger the delusions, the more unhappiness and frustration we will feel.

Thus, merely pursuing material wealth contributes to our unhappiness, whereas subduing our mind does not require us to exert so much physical energy. Rather, we just need to recognise the delusions in the mind and try to subdue them by training the mind in meditation and so forth.

When Sakya Pandita mentions that the best wealth is generosity, he means that generosity is our inner wealth. It is much easier to be generous than to try and accumulate more outer wealth. The more you engage in real generosity, the more contentment and happiness you will experience. So generosity is a wealth that brings us a real sense of well-being; it also has a natural consequence of bringing us more external wealth as well. However, if we lack a generous mind, if we are miserly when we engage in the pursuit of material wealth, we will have to expend much time and energy and we remain under the influence of the delusions.

Of course, we need some material wealth for our survival. But if we spend all our energy and time in pursuing material wealth with the notion that is going to bring us happiness, we are missing the point, because real happiness comes from within, from controlling the mind. So there is a deep meaning to this advice about generosity being the best wealth.

In summary, we should not allow our minds to be completely influenced by external distractions. If we make some attempt to meditate – to familiarise our mind with focusing on a virtuous object – this would contribute to bringing a real sense of contentment and happiness in our mind.

Now we will take a few minutes to engage in meditation. Remember the main points of meditation, which are to sit in an upright and comfortable position, then bring our mind inwards, choosing a virtuous or neutral object on which to focus; in this case, it is the breath, a neutral object. When we focus 100% on our breath, this prevents our mind being influenced by the delusions. This is a first attempt to separate our mind from the influence of the delusions and distractions.

As mentioned earlier, the influence of the delusions is the main cause of our frustrations, misery and suffering. Therefore, it is important that we attempt to separate our mind from the delusions and distractions by being determined to focus 100% on the breath, even if we only do it for a few moments – as long as we do it sincerely and to the best of our ability. We must keep reminding ourselves that for these few minutes we have now, we will not allow the mind to be influenced by the delusions. It is important not to do meditation half-heartedly, where one half of the mind is interested in meditating while the other half of the mind is wandering. If you just let the mind wander, that will not be a sincere, focused meditation. To the best of your ability, you need to keep reminding yourself that you are going to focus on your breath.

The technique is to focus on the natural inflow and outflow of the breath. We should not view ourselves as an observer watching the breath as something separate from ourselves. Rather, to the best of our ability, we should imagine that there is no separation between us and the breath – that the breath itself is our focus, our mind. When we focus on the inflow and outflow of our breath, it is as though we are

watching our own mind, to the point where it is as though our mind and the breath become one, like water being poured into water. This is an important point to remember. We will now spend a few minutes focusing on our breath. *(Pause for meditation)*

Some people seem to be in deep meditation, but I have to bring you out of meditation now! If anyone in real meditation were to be disturbed, they would not get angry. If the meditation were not a real meditation, however, any disturbance would irritate the mind. It's like the story of someone who appeared to be meditating. Another person came up and asked the meditator: "What are you doing?". The other person replied: "Meditating"... "Oh, really, what are you meditating on?"... "I'm meditating on patience". Then the questioner started swearing and used foul language and the one who said he was meditating on patience started to get very angry and upset! *(laughter)*.

The meaning of the story is while the person meditating might well have been meditating on patience, the real effect of meditating on patience is to not be affected, even when the outer conditions are there. It is one thing not to get angry when there are no outer conditions to make one angry, but the real test in developing patience is when the conditions are present to make one angry, if one can remain peaceful at such times, this is the real sign of progress in our meditation on patience.

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 the text, we have come to the point of explaining the effects or results of virtuous actions. As with the results of non-virtuous actions, there are three types of result: fully ripened results, causally concordant results and environmental results. The fully ripened results of virtuous actions were explained earlier.

The text explains that the causally concordant and environmental results of virtuous karma are the exact opposites of the causally concordant and environmental effects of negative actions, which was explained earlier. What we need to understand is that the fully ripened and causally concordant effects are experienced by the beings themselves, whereas the environmental results are in relation to the outside circumstances, the environment.

We now come to the third sub-heading under the heading of karma and its effects, which is a presentation of the other classifications of karma. Within this, we have the distinction between projecting and completing karma.

The text explains that in general, a karma that projects one into a happy rebirth or realm is a virtuous karma, and a karma that projects one into rebirth in an unfortunate realm is a non-virtuous one. What we call projecting karma is karma that will cause to experience a particular type of

result in a particular future realm. Projecting karma is a definite karma, in the sense that a virtuous projecting karma will always bring about a virtuous result, and a non-virtuous or negative projecting karma will always bring a negative result.

For completing karma, however, there is no certainty. Even if one were to experience virtuous projecting karma, the completing karma could be experienced as non-virtuous or negative, and vice versa. So completing karma is not definite. Completing karma depends on the circumstances experienced while the result of the projecting karma is experienced.

We can explain this further with an example. Our own rebirth as a human being is a result of a virtuous projecting karma. However, depending on the circumstances in our life, there could sometimes be happiness or unhappiness; we experience good and bad results. There are many circumstances in which we may have experience unsatisfactory experiences, which are what we call non-virtuous completing karmas. The explanation given in the teachings regarding completing karma is that, even in happy realms, non-virtuous actions can create such effects as not having complete limbs, fingers or sensory organs, or having an unpleasant colour, a short lifespan, many illnesses or poverty. We find that this is very true. Among human beings there are many who experience great misery and suffering throughout their life.

The text further explains that there are virtuous completing karmas that can create consummate wealth, even for animals and hungry ghosts. Even beings reborn as animals as a result of non-virtuous projecting karmas may have virtuous completing karmas. For example, some pets are well-fed and well looked-after by their owners. Even though they are born in an animal realm, which is an unfortunate rebirth, due to non-virtuous projecting karma, their completing karma can be quite virtuous to the extent that they are well-fed and taken care of. In many circumstances they seem to have a better life, materially speaking, than many people who are starving. This is an example of a non-virtuous projecting karma but a virtuous completing karma.

We sometimes find the awkward situation where the pets are well-fed and comfortable, sleeping most of the day and really enjoying their time at home, while the owners themselves have to work hard, then come back home and can't even sleep well! Especially where there is worry and anxiety, some people suffer from insomnia, whereas their pets could be sleeping very soundly.

As we said earlier, an example of a virtuous projecting karma experienced with non-virtuous completing karma is the case of those who, even though they are born human, may spend their entire life experiencing much suffering, either as a result of illnesses or complete poverty. Extreme poverty and illness are examples of non-virtuous completing karma taking effect.

There is also the case of virtuous projecting karma and virtuous completing karma. An example, would be our own case, where we are experiencing the results of a virtuous projecting karma – to be reborn as a human being – as well as having sufficient food, clothing, etc. Even if we do get sick from time to time, we have the medication and all the perfect conditions to look after ourselves and to be taken care of. Whatever we think we may be suffering, it is actually quite minor and insignificant in relation to those who are really

suffering.

Therefore our own situation is an example of both virtuous projecting karma completed by virtuous completing karma.

Having explained virtuous projecting karma with non-virtuous projecting karma, there can also be two types of result of completing karma. The example we gave earlier of non-virtuous projecting karma completed by virtuous completing karma was that of well-fed, well-tended animals. An example of non-virtuous projecting karma completed by non-virtuous completing karma would be animals born in situations where they are constantly living in fear and undergoing other types of sufferings due to the environment they inhabit and other circumstances. We have many examples of animals that live in great terror.

The main point here is that there are four possibilities for virtuous and non-virtuous projecting and completing karmas.

There is a second category under this heading – the possession of other classifications of karma – which is that there are karmas whose results will either definitely, or only possibly, be experienced.

Basically, a karma created with all the four conditions present, a complete path of karma, is said to be a karma whose results, once created, will be definitely experienced. Whereas with incomplete karma, the results would be only possibly experienced – it's not definite.

We can take the example of killing an animal. If the killing is done with all four conditions present – the basis of the animal, a clear motivation to kill the animal, intending to kill the animal out of anger or hatred or delusions, completing the karma, and having a sense of satisfaction that we have done the act – this seals the karma and makes it a complete karma of killing. Such an act of killing, would be a karma for which the results would definitely be experienced.

If we take the example of killing again, even if there is an intention to kill and half-way through, one decides not to kill, or even if the killing has been done, if one immediately regrets the act, then the karma is said to be incomplete. Because one doesn't have the full sense of satisfaction from killing and regrets the act, there would be not a complete karma.

It is the same for all of the other nine non-virtuous actions. To be a complete act, a complete karma, it must have the strong motivation to do it at the beginning, during the action itself, and on completion, when one rejoices and feels happy about doing the act. When that is present, it is a complete karma, the results of which will definitely be experienced.

If we find ourselves engaging in any negative karma but at the very next moment realise that we have done something improper and non-virtuous and we have regret in our mind, this minimises the consequences of the effect, and in fact that karma would not be complete. This is a very important point to remember in our daily lives, bringing this understanding and awareness in whatever we are doing.

We have some time for questions, if there are any.

Question: What happens if you kill the animal and your intention is to kill the animal, and you kill the animal with a feeling of love and know that the animal is going to provide meat for a lot of people?

Translator: Killing with love for the animal? Or for others?

Questioner: You are not killing it because you hate the animal, you are doing it with a feeling of love, that the animal must be killed to provide meat.

Answer: Details about that will come later in the text. There is a lot of discussion about that. There are many more circumstances or conditions that must be present or not present in determining whether karma is really negative or whether one accumulates a negative karma or not. There are specific indications in the text further on regarding certain karmas you may engage in but not accumulate. For example, there are certain actions one may have to engage in involuntarily, because one has been forced to do it and there is no choice whatsoever. So one does the action, but because it was done involuntarily and one didn't intend to do the action, positive or negative, one would not accumulate the karma of that action.

Your question falls somewhere in that category. It will become clearer later, when we go through that part of the text.

Actually, it may sound confusing to hear that there are certain karmas one has engaged in but has not accumulated. What does it mean? When a karma is created, doesn't one accumulate the karma as well? The explanation in the text goes into finer details about the difference between engaging in a karma and actually accumulating a karma.

In earlier explanations about this, I found that many people seemed quite startled or confused. I think that sometimes it may be through the translation – engaging in a karma may sometimes be translated as accumulating karma, but I don't know. In Tibetan there is a specific explanation of the two different types, which I would translate as engaging and accumulating karma – so basically there is a difference between engaging in and accumulating a karma. When we use the examples given in the text, and think about their meaning, it will become clear, regardless of the words we use. This will come later.

Question: I am a little bit unclear about what completing karma actually is and what projecting karma actually is. What is an example of them? There was an example in Australia this week of someone who seemed to do a lot of virtue in his life in relation to animals and then is killed by an animal, so there is obviously a projecting karma there from his past life and a completing karma. Can we use that example, someone who does virtue in relation to animals and then is killed by an animal suddenly and violently?

Answer: Generally the teachings explain how we have more conditions for death than for survival. That's a fact that applies to any human being. It is explained in the teachings that the very condition of being born as a human being in samsara is a condition contributing to death.

We can take this particular example is being the case in general. I wasn't able to translate the finer points of your question about how it relates particularly to projecting or completing karma, but that's in general.

Question: There have been instances of Tibetan Buddhist monks self-immolating and my question is what the karmic implications of that is.

Translator: Are you saying that there have been instances to your knowledge?

Questioner: There certainly has been.

Translator: Tibetan monks?

Questioner: Yes, in Delhi.

Answer: It was not a monk. But I think we have heard about monks in other traditions having done that.

As was explained earlier, when we talked about karma, we talked about the four conditions that are needed to be intact. For completing karma, there must be the basis of another being, not oneself. So your particular example does not fall into a complete karma of killing as the basis is not intact.

Questioner (continuing): In the eyes of some people that would be an act of suicide. I don't see it that way.

Answer: Geshe-la's main point here is that the basis has to be another sentient being – for a complete act of killing to occur, another sentient being has to be the basis. In this case, the basis is oneself, not another sentient being, so the basis is missing for it to be a complete path of karma.

In the explanation of the basis, the text says that even if it is another sentient being, the other has to die before oneself for a complete path of karma to be accumulated; the other sentient being that one intends to kill has to die before oneself. If you die together that also does not become a complete path of karma. It would be an incident where the basis is missing or not complete.

Question: Going back to the previous question, it is usually what you have done in a past life. So if you are killed by an animal, it's because of a past life experience. I mean what you do in this life relates to the next life unless it's a holy object.

Answer: That is how it is explained – that what we experience now is a completing karma that is a result, generally speaking, of a past-life karma. So our positive experiences would be a positive completing karma, and the negative consequences we experience are negative completing karma.

There would be many circumstances of sometimes experiencing virtuous completing karma, and sometimes non-virtuous completing karma. It's not one fixed thing that we experience in one lifetime. Obviously, it can vary.

Of course, what we wish to experience is happiness – that is what we strive for. So in relation to completing karma, what we experience as happiness is what we call a virtuous completing karma. Generally, we can say there are pleasures or happiness that are considered to be the birthright of a human being. Yet there are certain human beings who are completely deprived of those pleasures or happiness that most human beings experience. Any human being who is deprived of their human birthright, such as the pleasures of food, clothing and so forth, is experiencing a non-virtuous completing karma.

Maybe we will stop here for this evening. Of course, many doubts and questions may arise about karma. In fact, it is extremely difficult to understand the full workings of karma. As explained in the teachings, this topic is very subtle.

The complexities of karma are extremely subtle to the point where the only one who knows the complexities and subtleties of karma is an enlightened being's mind, which is an omniscient mind possessed by a Buddha. Only a Buddha knows the subtleties and complexities of karma – why this was experienced, what was the initial cause, when was this karma created to experience this result, how was it created, what was the motivation at that time, and so forth. These subtleties cannot be determined by an ordinary sentient being's mind.

The teachings on karma have a certain amount of logic. The

general explanations of cause and effect are logical to a certain extent, and based on that, we can generate faith and assume the subtleties of karma to be so. That is as best as we can do. We can attempt to try and understand karma as far as our logical minds can extend, but when it comes to the subtleties of karma, we have to put our faith in an enlightened being's omniscient mind.

The reason why it is called an omniscient mind is because it knows everything exactly as it is. If we take these flowers in the vase, when we look at them, we may take them at face value – the flowers are produced from certain causes and conditions and are born from a seed. But in fact when we look into the subtleties of how a flower is produced – where does the particular cause for the red or white pigment come from, how was that produced, what kind of atoms came into place to produce the green colour, the shape, the varieties of colours in flowers. There are so many different kinds of flowers, there obviously must be different causes and conditions. To know at the very subtlest level the interaction of causes and conditions that brought about the result of these flowers in the vase is beyond an ordinary being's mind. Only an omniscient mind can know that.

Therefore, an omniscient mind is called an omniscient mind because it knows everything to the subtlest detail of how things came about through causes and conditions and so forth, to the very tiniest particle.

Question: It is my understanding that the Buddha listed the nature of karma as one of the four imponderables.

Translator: Imponderable... what does that mean?

Questioner: A waste of time to ponder on! The other three were to speculate on the level of another person's level of spirituality, the epistemology of the universe, and the nature of rebirth.

Answer: The real imponderable is said to be emptiness. More specifically, emptiness is said to be inexpressible – the experience of emptiness cannot be expressed.

The analogy given is that when we taste something sweet, we can agree that it is sweet, but the experience of sweetness cannot really be described. The experience of sweetness cannot be conveyed in actual words. Hence certain things have to be understood at an experiential level, it is left to the personal experience of the individual and cannot really be expressed in words. Geshe-la had something to explain here, but he said maybe will leave it for another time.

The questions were very meaningful with a lot of insight. Thank-you very much. They were really good questions. If my answers were not sufficient, I have to apologise. The best we can do is just discuss the points – as mentioned earlier, it is really hard to get the full meaning. The main point is that I would not be upset if the question did not seem to be clear. Similarly, if my answer was not so clear, you tried the patient with that! *(laughter)*

If we can again sit upright in a comfortable position, and this time focus on Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra to be recited.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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