

---

## The Condensed Lam Rim

༄༅། །བྱང་ལྷན་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བཞུགས་སོ། །

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

11 October 2006

---

As usual it is good to spend some time in meditation, sitting in an upright and comfortable position. As we find a physically comfortable position, it is equally important to have a relaxed mind. We notice an immediate effect when we have a relaxed body and a relaxed mind - we experience a relaxed atmosphere and we feel relaxed ourselves. This shows that we are definitely related to our body and mind. When we talk about our body and our mind, it is as though they are possessions of ours. Nevertheless the connection between us, the body and the mind is very intricate.

If the body and mind is not relaxed, or it is disturbed in any way, then it affects us. We, the owner of the body and mind, are also disturbed. Similarly, if the body and mind is relaxed, then we ourselves feel relaxed. This shows the very intricate relationship between us and our body and mind, even though we are distinct from our body and mind. When we have a relaxed body and mind, this relationship contributes to our own peaceful and relaxed state of feeling. Having a sound body and mind becomes extremely important and crucial for own well-being.

Because of the interdependent relationship we have with our body and mind, we definitely see the effects of that relationship. For our own well-being it is essential to have a good healthy physical body as well as a healthy mind. A healthy mind means having a clear focused mind, a mind which is not disturbed. Physical health and mental health primarily relate to having a positive clear mind. A healthy body and mental well-being enables us to have a good life.

This is also true, not only from a spiritual or religious point of view, but even from a worldly point of view it becomes very clear that for whatever worldly activities we want to accomplish, we first need to have good health. Without good health we will not be able to use our body in an efficient way. Having good health is one of the first things we need to accomplish anything that we want to do. In addition to good physical health we need to have a sound and clear mind. The combination of having a physically healthy body and a clear positive mind allows us to accomplish what we need to do, whether it's a business endeavour or study and so forth. Similarly, and even more so for a religious purpose where we practise meditation or dharma, we definitely need this combination of a good sound body and mind to achieve something positive for ourselves.

So we need to pay attention to maintaining good health as well as a sound mind. Those are our prized

possessions, which we need and will use throughout our life. We can do without some material possessions, however for our temporal as well as our ultimate purpose - in every circumstance - we definitely need a good sound body and a sound mind to accomplish what we need to achieve. Good health and a sound mind become the most essential tools for us to lead a happy life; they are our aid and our companions through life. Just as we pay attention to our physical health, likewise it is essential that we pay attention in keeping a sound mind, which becomes a means for us to have a more fulfilled and happier life as time passes by.

As we put effort in developing and keeping a clear mind we will notice that it brings real inner satisfaction and happiness to our life. And since we all wish to have a long life, then this becomes a real means for us to have a happy long life. We can learn a lot just from observing the people around us. If we look around we can definitely see that there is a huge difference in life experiences for those who pay attention to their physical and mental health and those who do not. We can learn so much just by observing and looking into the situations around us. We can use the positive experiences of others as an example of how to lead our life.

People who neglect their mental health and don't pay attention to developing their mind have a very unhappy depressed mind. When we see the kind of life that people who have poor health as well as a depressed mind lead, compared to people who have good physical health and a clear sound mind, we can see which life we want to follow. These examples clearly show the disadvantages of those who neglect their physical and mental health, and it becomes clear to us that we don't want to follow that path.

We can achieve a sound healthy mind by protecting the mind from things that disturb the mind, such as delusions, distractions and disturbing thoughts that arise in the mind. We need to protect our mind from being influenced by the negative states of mind.

One technique for achieving that is to meditate on the breath. Sit in a physically comfortable position, and then choose the breath as an object to focus on. We can focus on the breath 100 percent by being determined, for a few minutes, not to allow our mind to be distracted. Focus the mind completely on the breath, and for a few minutes just focus on the natural rhythm of the breath.

Pause for meditation

The eight qualities or attributes of a human life and how they help us to benefit others was explained in our last session. Most of us already have many of these qualities and they can be further developed. This depends on the causes; anything is possible if one creates the causes for it. There are eight specific causes for each of the eight attributes.

The first attribute or quality of a human life is to have a long and healthy life. When we actually think about this quality, there is no question in our mind that we would like to have a long and healthy life. The causes for

---

---

obtaining a long life are twofold: the first is to intentionally avoid harming other beings, directly or indirectly, and second to avoid the intention to harm them. Even in a worldly sense, refraining from harming others is considered a virtue. Someone who avoids harming others is considered to be a gentle person, well-behaved, and socially accepted as a good person. We can definitely see that by refraining from harming others and having no intention to harm, people naturally trust us, begin to like us and become close to us. That is something really very important.

We definitely contribute to others' wellbeing merely by being determined not to harm them. Developing a determination to refrain from harming others actually becomes a benefit for others. How? By making others around oneself feel comfortable and feel at ease. Isn't it true that we ourselves feel uncomfortable as soon as we are in the presence of someone that we know is a violent person with harmful intentions? For example, if we hear about someone around us who is prone to stealing things, even though we may not be directly affected right there and then, just merely hearing that someone who is prone to take things is around makes us feel uncomfortable, doesn't it? Similarly, anyone near who has any harmful intentions makes others feel uncomfortable and uneasy.

The opposite of that is true for those who have a gentle mind, those who do not wish to harm others, people who naturally bring a general atmosphere of feeling comfortable and being at ease. With a harmful intention there is no room for benefiting others. As long as there is a harmful intention in the mind, then there is no real benefit for anyone, because harmful actions come from harmful intention. Therefore in terms of benefiting others, the first step is to refrain from harmful intentions based on a non-violent attitude, which is the opposite of harming others. Based on that attitude, one can extend help, benefit others, and receive benefits from others. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama stresses in his teachings: if one cannot benefit others, than at the very least don't harm others. That is very deep sound advice.

Another cause for having a long life is to free animals or humans from immediate danger of their life. For example, if other animals are being led to slaughter and if we can protect them or buy them and release them, then that is definitely of great benefit and an immediate benefit to them. Helping to prolong others' lives becomes a cause for our own long life. Engaging in these sorts of activities will result in having a long life.

The causes for having a healthy life free from sickness are to engage in activities such as nursing and taking care of others who are sick, and being generous with administering the proper medication as well as foods to nourish them. These activities create the causes to achieve a healthy life for oneself in the future. When we look into an explanation of this, it's very logical. There is a direct relationship between the care that we give others and the resulting benefit we receive ourselves. Caring for the sick as an attendant, as a nurse or doctor is incredibly beneficial. The extent of appreciation would be known

only by someone who has been sick or has been admitted in hospital.

If one has been a patient oneself one can see how incredibly kind the doctors and the nurses are in providing us with care. We are totally in the hands of normally what we would call strangers. For example, if we are taken to hospital in an emergency, we are put in the hands of people we have never met before, yet these people are ready to serve us and help us. When people are saved from a certain state or cured from a certain disease, particularly in cases of patients who have had long illnesses, they feel a natural appreciation towards the doctors who helped to cure them, plus the nurses who had cared for them on a daily basis, the so-called strangers.

Normally one may not consider relying upon strangers, let alone talking to them. We would not normally consider talking to strangers easy. However if we are in a situation where we are sick, then we are in such a vulnerable situation. We have to completely depend upon and put our life into the hands of strangers. So when strangers do take care of us and nurse us and provide us with medication, that sort of appreciation becomes intense when we realise how much benefit we received.

The benefit of serving others who are sick becomes a cause for a healthy life free from sickness. If one has the understanding of the dharma then it does not become just a mere job, but rather a real practice of the dharma. This is just one instance of how, with the understanding of the dharma, one can utilise one's normal daily work into the practice. We can really use this one particular example in any other job that benefits others; we can really put it into practice to really be of great service.

Releasing animals from immediate danger is a cause to achieve a long life. Helping patients or people who are sick when they are in need, to provide help and assistance to them, is a cause to achieve good health. The importance of the care that doctors and nurses give to others, and anyone in that profession that gives immediate assistance to others who are particularly ill, cannot be underestimated. It is incredibly beneficial. However it really depends very much on the attitude that one has. With an attitude of kindness one's immediate assistance of nursing or administering medication becomes extremely beneficial.

I remember when many monks were getting ill soon after having escaped into India. There was one monk in hospital whose body was all swollen up and his sickness was considered contagious, so he was put in a separate room. Now the main doctors in that particular clinic had come to the conclusion that this illness cannot really be cured. They told the other monks to start making prayers for him because there was nothing much they could do.

But there was a young doctor who turned up and said that she knows about this sort of disease but the medication is not in this particular hospital. She actually went out to find the particular medication to cure that particular disease, purchased it herself and administered

---

it herself. That monk got cured and is living up to this day. Naturally that monk was extremely grateful for that personal care and that doctor actually not only cured him but she saved him from his illness.

And so to this day when he does his daily prayers, he says that he often remembers that doctor on a daily basis and makes specific prayers and dedications for her. This shows how grateful one person felt from receiving personal care. That care was extended to the point where the doctor would come up to three times a night to check on him. Her husband was also a doctor who made medicines, so together they would discuss and make sure that the medication was administered in the right way, and after some time the monk was completely cured.

Besides having the skill and the knowledge of the medication, there is also having the kind heart to administer it and to personally look into the care of a patient, which in this case actually saved the patient. The main factor is the kindness in the heart, demonstrated by the personal responsibility that the doctor took in looking after the patient. Furthermore, she herself paid for the medication, which is something quite remarkable in India.

#### *Questions*

Q: I'm in a situation now where I'm seeing people doing good work but there is a lot of corruption involved.

Translator: Is the person who is helping the one who is corrupted?

Q: It's one of those situations where people are helping, but there is corruption involved, taking it off the top. People are actually trying to help someone, but they are taking advantage of them. Helping, but taking advantage at the same time.

Translator: Is it referring to the individuals or the organisation?

Q: The organisation.

A: Of course in whatever service one does for others, there is the practical side of having to support oneself. So that is where of course the wages or whatever salary that one receives is deducted. The practical side is that one needs to deduct from donations or whatever for one's own survival. But if one goes beyond the norms, then that is where it may be called corruption. If that is the case and they are going beyond the normal accepted salary that they are due to receive, then that would be a case of being greedy. The help they are providing is good, but then on the other hand they are being corrupt with the money. There are circumstances however, where people may make a lot of money and profit from something, but then they use that profit to also help others. Just seeing others making profit out of something may not necessarily be a bad thing if that profit is used to help others. So one has to be careful in seeing where and how it's being used.

Q: When people are helping others, what happens when the helper actually becomes sick through self-neglect?

A: That of course is a valid point in terms of how we should not neglect our own health. When people are trying to help others, it is equally important to maintain their own good health. There are of course some practitioners who are able to give up their own life for others. If one has not reached that ability yet in one's practice, then on a practical level one needs to take care of one's own health and one's own life in order to give more service to others. Of course one needs to find a balance there.

Giving up one's own life for the sake of others can be seen in ordinary circumstances. For example, a mother who is pregnant with a child may, due to some complications, be told that if the child is not taken out sooner, they might both die. The mother might say 'I don't care about my own life even if I were to die in the complication, as long as you can save the child I don't care about my own life'. These are the sorts of like examples where a mother has taken her own child's life into consideration and gives up her own life. This of course comes down to a personal circumstance of whether one has the ability or not.

Q: Could you please explain emptiness. What it means in the Heart Sutra?

A: Emptiness is referred in Buddhist teachings such as the Heart Sutra. Something is empty of something, right? So what is it empty of? For example, a person empty of inherent independent existence is what that person is empty of. When we talk about the emptiness of a person, we are talking about how a person is empty of inherent or independent substantial existence. When one realises that the person is empty of inherent existence - when the person does not exist in that way - then that is the emptiness of a person.

The Heart Sutra talks about 'form is empty, emptiness is form'. That phrase refers to 'form' as being empty - 'form' meaning substantial objects such as the table. 'Form is empty' refers to the fact that any kind of object which is a matter is empty of inherent or independent existence. Because it is empty of independent inherent existence, it is empty.

'Emptiness is form': while form is empty of inherent existence or independent existence, nevertheless form does function in a conventional way, by performing actions or performing a service. While form is empty of inherent existence, it does still exist and functions in a conventional way.

Let us now once again sit in a comfortable and upright position, bringing our mind inward away from distractions and focus on the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

*Transcribed from tape by Lois Smith*

*Edit 1 by Cynthia Karena*

*Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe*

*Edited Version*

*© Tara Institute*