
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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As usual, it would be good to spend a few minutes in meditation.

For that purpose we sit in an upright and comfortable position.

Contemplative meditation means training the mind to focus on one particular object that one chooses and keeping one's attention or focus on that object without allowing the mind to be distracted. That is what is called contemplative meditation.

That is the description of an effective contemplative meditation. Our experience, however, is that when we try to keep our focus on certain objects such as the breath we find that the mind becomes completely distracted. This is because we allow our minds to be influenced by the various thoughts that arise in the mind. Those thoughts are, in turn, influenced by the various different delusions that arise in the mind.

For as long as we allow ourselves to be influenced by the mind, or the various thoughts that arise in the mind which are in turn influenced by the delusions then, to that extent, our mind will be completely overwhelmed and distracted by worldly concerns. As a result of our mind completely following worldly distractions we will experience a confused mind that is full of anxiety, worries and problems and this contributes to us having an unsettled and unhappy mind. That is clearly the direction of our life for as long as we let our mind be completely influenced by distractions or delusions in the mind.

When we are controlled by a distracted mind we find that when we look into the basis of our worries and our anxieties that most of these anxieties and worries are just based on speculations, or what we might call paranoias. They may not be in accord to a real, factual situation. Most of our worries are in relation to concerns about what may happen in the future or what others may be thinking about one. Most of our worries are based on speculations. If our worries were based on some reality there might be some reason to worry. We could say that we have something to worry about. When we look into our worries and find that most of the worries are baseless, that they are just based on speculation, we find it is pointless to let our mind be influenced by so many different kinds of worries and paranoias. These are what are called 'disturbing conceptions' that arise in the mind. As long as the mind is influenced by disturbing conceptions, then one disturbing conception leads to the next, and contributes to all the worries and anxieties in

our mind. That, in turn, contributes to us having an unhappy and unsettled mind.

If we wish to overcome such disturbed states of mind and achieve a happier, more content mind it is appropriate that we put some effort in meditation. Meditation is a means to separate the distracted mind from the concentrated, focused mind. The attempt to bring the mind inward and focus it on a particular object of our choice naturally makes the mind more settled and subdued. Then, as a result, the mind becomes more relaxed and happier, more content. As we find through the experience of even a short meditation that our mind comes to that state it is appropriate that we really look into, and put some more effort into, developing our meditation skills.

When we first begin to try meditation we might actually be quite surprised, and even quite amazed, to find that our mind can actually reach a state of calmness. We might not be used to the mind being calm, if the mind is usually completely distracted and full of worries. From that initial attempt we may gain an experience of a calm mind in comparison to a very chaotic, disturbed mind. Even from the very first attempt, even for just a few moments, of trying to keep our mind focused, if it is done sincerely with the right technique, we would experience some sort of immediate effect of calmness and restfulness. That might really surprise us but that is the natural state of the mind.

When we familiarise the mind with being more focused and distance our mind from the distractions the mind will have a natural tendency to become more and more settled, calm and subdued. Therefore, we must not lose that initial experience that we gain from a few minutes of meditation. We must use that as our anchoring point. We must always come back to those few moments of sincere meditation. We maintain that and slowly, the main point of the technique is not to rush into doing long meditations, continually working with that on a regular basis, add onto it gradually. Then, when the mind becomes more and more familiar with meditation, with being focused on the object, one would naturally be able to prolong meditation. Initially it is very important that we maintain a sincere but short duration for our meditation.

Having given a brief introduction of the purpose and benefit of meditation, we will now actually spend a few minutes in meditation. As mentioned earlier, we check our body to see that it is in an upright but relaxed sitting posture. The object that we choose to focus on as a basis for developing our meditation is our own breath. We focus on the natural rhythm of our breathing, the inflow and outflow of our breath. Before we actually focus on our breath it is important that we determine that our mind is completely focused on our breath. We withdraw our mind from any other distractions, thoughts and ideas and so forth. We leave that all aside and just for the few minutes that we attempt to meditate we try to bring our mind inward and bring our mind to focus on our breath and keep it only on the breath. Whenever we find our mind getting distracted we bring it back to focusing on

the breath. In this way we can spend a few minutes for meditation now. *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

Just a brief summary of what we have been covering in the last few sessions. Earlier we explained the eight attributes of a perfect human life. Since then we have been covering the causes for obtaining these eight attributes or qualities of a perfect human life. Having explained that there are eight perfect qualities that a human life can have the question arises, "Can one obtain that for the future?" The text then explains that one can obtain these qualities if one engages in the causes for obtaining the qualities.

So far we have been covering the causes for the first, second and third qualities. The first is a perfect lifespan which means having a long life without sickness or illnesses and the causes for that were explained. The second quality is a perfect complexion. This means having good looks and good features. Even if one has a good lifespan that is not sufficient to have a perfect life. One would have to have good features, be good looking and that would help to benefit others, attract others and so forth. The causes to obtain a good complexion were explained. Then, thirdly, on top of having a good complexion one needs to come from a good lineage family. That would bring natural respect from others. The causes for obtaining a good lineage were also explained. Now we come into the fourth, on top of a good lineage one would need to have good power and resources for a perfect human life.

As we hear explanations of these qualities of a perfect human life, we come to notice that these are all qualities that we wish to have ourselves. We would definitely like to have a long life that is free from illness. There's no one who would like to have illnesses, so having a long life free from illness is something that we will all naturally desire. We all know that good features, and having good looks with sound organs, is something that we all wish for as well. It's something that we would very naturally like to have. Coming from a good lineage where others respect one naturally, is also something that we would all naturally wish for.

These are all qualities that are in accord with what we would like for ourselves. If it is in accord with something that we would like for ourselves we would naturally be interested in how to obtain these qualities. The causes of how to obtain these qualities for the future are something that will be appropriate for us to engage in and

something that we can strive towards.

The causes for perfect power and resources. It is explained in the text that the causes for obtaining consummate or perfect power and resources are to engage in acts of generosity oneself. Acts of generosity include giving food and clothing and so forth to the needy. When others who are deprived of the basic necessities come to one and ask for these things then, if we are able to be generous and give others what they need, that becomes the cause for us to obtain power and resources ourselves.

When people are in need and don't ask for help but one knows that they need food or clothing or whatever that one has, one can be generous even when they don't ask for help. We know that even in normal circumstances there are times when we know that others, whether they may be relations or friends, are in need of help with money or clothing or other resources and if we have a good connection with them, even though they would not ask for help, we would naturally want to help them. Knowing that they are in need of help we would provide them with whatever we can. That would be seen as a very noble deed, a generous deed. Likewise with people one does not have particular relationships with such as beggars and so forth. Even if they may not be asking for something in particular, maybe out of embarrassment or not wishing to disturb us, if we know that they need help and one were to be generous, then that is a noble deed.

Leaving aside the benefits that one would obtain in future lifetimes, which is the main explanation here, even in the short time of this life we can definitely see how benefiting each other when in need becomes a real source of wellbeing and happiness, mutual respect and harmony. We can see that a family, in which the relatives are helping each other, particularly when in need, is a family that is living in harmony and has a genuine respect for each other because they help each other when in need. This becomes a means to derive some real goodness or wellbeing in this lifetime. The results are very obvious. That is therefore a very good practice that we can engage in.

There are definitely many, great, practical benefits of being generous with each other. This is an experience that I have definitely had myself though it may not be appropriate to mention it all now.

To just give one example of an incident that relates to my own experience. When I was living and studying at the university in Saranath, which is in Varanasi in India, the evening meal was not really that substantial and not even very good. There were times when I would just skip the meal and go hungry. I would go off to the stupa and just go round circumnambulating. On a few occasions, which I remember very vividly now, I met one of the other Geshes, Geshe Yeshe Thopden, and he'd ask me "Oh, what are you doing?" I would reply, "I'm just going around the stupa". He would say, "Have you had a meal yet?", and I said "No, I haven't. I'm actually quite hungry". And then he said, "Oh, I happen to be having a cooked meal. I can share it with you", then he would offer

his meal to me. I would appreciate that so much that it is something that I remember very vividly to this day.

This would be in the 1970's, 1971 or '72. Obviously it's been many years but I still have that memory very fresh in my mind owing to the fact of how beneficial it was at that time. Geshe Yeshe Thopden was a good friend of mine even though he was a few classes above me. He was very generous with his food.

This incident and experience on a personal level explains how the benefit that anyone receives at a time of real, desperate situations is a benefit that is highly appreciated and never forgotten. We can use this as an analogy to the Dharma, the teachings. We can relate that to how appreciative one can feel towards the teachers who imparted their knowledge to us when we were beginners and completely ignorant and had a hard time understanding things. The teachers who took the time to explain things to us and to give us their time and were associating with us on the same level as ourselves are really the teachers who have been extremely kind. When we think about how they have benefited us at a desperate time when we didn't know anything, you can really begin to appreciate and feel their kindness. There are of course higher beings such as the deities, enlightened being, that we may be able to communicate with and receive teachings from when we gain further realisations. But that is on a much higher level. In order to reach that level we have to rely on the very basic teachings and basic knowledge we get from the teacher that we had associated with on a very regular, ordinary basis.

Giving a dollar to a millionaire might not be considered as a remarkable gift. Similarly, when having worked hard for many years, even lifetimes to gain some realisations, and then one begins to receive teachings from the deities, and other enlightened beings. Relatively speaking, this is not so remarkable when we really needed this advice when we were beginners. So, when we couldn't see the deities and couldn't relate to them, it was the teachers in the ordinary aspect, who guided us by giving the teachings.

We can relate this to another practical level of those who have been kind to us; our parents. Particularly our mother, who carries us in her womb and then, after giving birth, takes care of us when we are in the most vulnerable stage of our life when we are completely dependent and can't do anything for ourselves. Our mother had been kind to us in feeding us, clothing us and washing us when we were not able to take care of ourselves in any way. This is something that we can begin to really appreciate when we think about it in that way. When we relate that even further, on a subtle level, we can see that our very survival up to this day is completely dependent on other sentient beings. When we expand the scope in this way we can begin to appreciate and think about the kindness of many other beings.

The teaching further explains that being generous also means being generous to those who are sick and unwell; patients. Being generous with our time and help and meeting their needs in that way becomes highly

beneficial, highly meritorious. There is also being generous with material aid to those who may have high intelligence and who may be practising but may be deprived of certain basic needs. We have examples from the great masters of the past, such as Milarepa, who did not have even the basic needs of clothing and so forth, let alone food. Lama Tsong Khapa practised with great austerity without much food and clothing. These are some classic examples of those who were great practitioners, very intelligent beings, but were seemingly lacking the basic needs. Being generous, if we are able, with such people, who are called holy objects, precious objects, is said to be a great act of generosity.

The text then explains the causes for obtaining trustworthy speech, the fifth quality of a perfect human life. On top of the earlier qualities, the next important attribute or quality of a perfect human life is to have trustworthy speech. If one has a trustworthy speech one will naturally gain respect from others and others will listen to one and so forth.

The causes for acquiring trustworthy speech or words are developing the habit of giving up the four non-virtuous forms of speech oneself. What are the four non-virtuous acts of speech that we went over earlier? The first non-virtuous form of speech is lying. Then comes slander or divisive speech, which is any speech or any words which separates two other people or partners or friends or groups. Slandorous or divisive speech is very harmful to others. The third is harsh speech, which means hurtful words or speech. Any kind of words or speech that hurts others, harms others, is harsh speech. The fourth is idle gossip. This means senseless speech, speech that involves gossip and talking about things that just contribute to delusions such as anger and so forth arising in the mind.

These four negative speeches definitely harm others and the negative consequences of lying and divisive speech and so forth are very clear. Avoiding these is not only a cause for obtaining good qualities in future lifetimes, anyone who avoids these four non-virtues on a daily basis will definitely be considered a trustworthy person. Anyone who is known to always tell the truth is someone that people will rely upon and trust. Similarly, avoiding the other non-virtues of speech is something that will be appreciated by others and is something beneficial for our life.

As we avoid these non-virtues of speech our speech naturally becomes soothing speech that is trustworthy and anyone who hears our speech will naturally favour and like it. Therefore it becomes a speech that benefits others, can really help others. It is something that is not only a good quality for our own benefit but has direct benefits for others as well. It is something worthwhile for us to consider and strive towards.

When we consider the advice and teachings presented here we can see that it has benefits for our daily life. It is not something that is contrary to our daily life. It is not something far-fetched, obscure and some sort of fantasy. Instead we find that there is a direct relationship between the wellbeing of our everyday life and creating the causes

for a perfect future life.

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

Question inaudible.

It's very true that it's difficult to meditate when you're sick.

As mentioned previously, at times of sickness it can be of some benefit if one can actually use that circumstance to contemplate and think a little bit about karma. Thinking about karma can be a great benefit. If one is not able to think about karma or relate one's sickness to the karma it might be a little difficult.

In fact one can turn one's sickness into a great practice, one of the most powerful practices. When one is ill one is obviously uncomfortable and miserable. Rather than dwelling on that state of being miserable and uncomfortable one can use that as a means to remind oneself how one is experiencing the effects or consequences of negative karma that one has created in the past. If one had not created negative karmas in the past, one would not experience the sickness.

Therefore, the initial contemplation can be determining to overcome negativity to the best of one's ability from now on and make the strong determination that, "I must definitely avoid negative deeds because I don't like the results that I am experiencing now". Then, based on that, one can further expand one's scope by contemplating along the lines, "May whatever sickness I'm experiencing now be a means to expend my negative karma, use up my negative karma, so that I may not have to experience it again in the future". Welcoming one's own sickness as a means to get rid of, or use up, one's negative karma. One can go even further with one's contemplation. One can further expand one's scope to include experiencing this negative consequences of illness as a means of exhausting the negative karmas of other sentient beings. When one includes all others who are also suffering like oneself and one takes one's own suffering as a means to exhaust the suffering of other beings the practice becomes much more profound. One makes the determination, "May my suffering now be a means to experience the negative causes and consequences that other beings have to suffer. May I suffer it now myself and may others not have to suffer. May my experiencing illness now become a means and ways to exhaust the sufferings of other sentient beings". In this way the practice becomes so profound, there's no higher practice one could do than a practice with such an attitude.

Question: Geshe-la, what reassurance can you give to someone who is feeling completely overwhelmed by the challenge of changing their mind?

The best means is to remind oneself of the advice that is given in the teachings that there is nothing that cannot be accomplished through familiarity. The great master Shantideva explained in his work *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life* that there's nothing that one cannot accomplish through familiarity of the mind. That means that there's no need to lose hope because, through familiarity, one can overcome any difficulties and problems.

Most of us are not familiar with the practice right now. We are mostly distracted with worldly thoughts. When we do attempt to practise we do it with intensity. We think we have to accomplish something soon. In fact that is not possible. We cannot accomplish much in just a short time. The reality is that we have to take time and we'll accomplish things over time. We may not see the benefit or the effect of what we do now right away because our mind is used to the distractions and a worldly attitude. Whatever practice we do will bring about an effect but we cannot recognise that right away. Slowly it will become obvious.

There is an analogy to help us understand how we might not see the benefit of a short duration of practice, right away. A drop of sweet water may not seem of benefit to a huge tree. But if that drop of water were continuous when it accumulates and slowly permeates down to the roots it definitely can bring a result for the tree to expand and give good fruit. The fruits will definitely materialise and ripen. It is similar with one or two efforts of practice. We may not see the results immediately, but if that small practice is done on a continuous basis the effects of our practice will definitely materialise and we can enjoy the fruits, the results, of that practice.

Our current difficulty is because our mind is on a beginners' level and is completely filled with adversities such as the delusions and so forth. Because this is prevalent even when we do a bit of practice it may seem that there's no effect. It may seem this way but this is not the case.

Using a burst of energy in practice is not very beneficial. In fact it may end up being an obstacle. If you put in so much energy and you don't find a result it may become a reason to give up completely. That would be much more harmful than to slowly use just a bit of practice and not expect quick, big results right away. Instead work with putting in small efforts on a continuous basis. We find this is also true in the secular world. An example is studies at universities. There are some who may go to one or two semesters and then give up saying, "This is just too difficult" and don't continue. They may not get the results of getting the scholarship or certificates and so forth.

We can end here for this evening.

Before we end the session we'll take a few moments to meditate. This time, sitting in an upright and comfortable position, we will use our mind to focus on the sound of the mantra of Buddha Shakyamuni. We keep our mind focused on the sound of the mantra and try to contemplate that.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

Transcribed from tape by Gabrielle Thomson

Edit 1 by John Burch

Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

Edited Version

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