
The Condensed Lam Rim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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As usual, it would be good to spend some time in meditation before we begin. For that purpose, we will sit in a comfortable and upright position, physically finding the right position as well as mentally containing ourselves. As we sit in a comfortable physical position, it is equally important to have a relaxed and alert state of mind.

As explained previously, the main purpose of meditation is to familiarise the mind in a positive way. Familiarisation is something that comes about after time. As we practice meditation we become more and more familiar with generating positive states of mind. Having a positive state of mind means we have a mind that is subdued and controlled. We can check within ourselves the extent to which our mind is controlled and the extent to which it is completely distracted and in a chaotic state. As a human being we have the intelligence to know what state of mind we are in. It is something that we are able to do when we check into ourselves. The ability to be able to identify the state of mind on a subtle level again needs to come from familiarisation and meditating, focusing inward.

As we focus inward and check within our mind we are able to see even subtle levels of disturbance or negativity and, as we begin to notice this, we are able to try to overcome those negativities. We can see for ourselves the consequences of our state mind. If we are in a negative state of mind we can see it in our speech and physical reactions towards others and ourselves. We can see that when we are in a negative state of mind, the physical and verbal results are not very beneficial for others and ourselves. Whereas when we are in a positive state of mind our verbal and physical actions are more meaningful, more beneficial for ourselves. It contributes to our wellbeing as well as to others' wellbeing. That is how we check within ourselves and find out for ourselves what it is that we need to familiarise ourselves with and adopt, for a positive frame of mind, and what we need to try to avoid, to overcome the negative states of mind.

As we investigate our own mind and use our intelligence to look within ourselves to identify the positive and negative states of mind within ourselves, and how they contribute to our wellbeing or destructive behaviour, we also begin to realise that that which contributes to our wellbeing or destruction is something that is developed within ourselves. It does not come from external factors as much as it is within oneself. In this way, when we begin to identify and notice that that which contributes to our wellbeing or destruction is actually something that is produced within oneself, we are able to identify

something that we can really work on and it becomes very useful for us.

As we identify the positive state of mind and the opposite, the negative states of mind and the disturbing attitudes and emotions within ourselves, we also come to notice that the positive states of mind are something that are harder to generate and once they have been generated are harder to maintain. It takes a lot of effort to keep that positive frame of mind. Disturbing states of mind or disturbing emotions such as anger, attachment, desire, or jealousy are very easily generated. Once they are generated they really prevail very strongly and we don't need much effort to maintain them. Actually it seems quite spontaneous. That is something that we notice as well.

As we identify that it is very hard to maintain positive frames of mind while it is very easy to follow destructive states of mind or the disturbing emotions we come to notice that, though they are easy to generate and maintain, disturbing emotions such as anger and desire contribute to the unrest in our mind. This is what contributes to the disturbance of one's mind, makes it unrelaxed and disturbs the calmness within one's mind. When one is really able to recognise that then the spontaneous wish or determination to change will develop within oneself. The wish or determination to change the vulnerability of our mind to the destructive emotions will develop. The determination to overcome the weakness of maintaining the positive frame of mind and changing it so that our positive state of mind becomes stronger and firmer and contributes to our wellbeing, our peace of mind so that we can overcome the destructive emotions within ourselves will also develop. Even though we may develop the determination we may still find it very difficult to really pursue. We may even come to a point where we feel that it seems almost impossible to really develop a completely positive frame of mind and impossible to overcome the negativities within one's mind. One may come to a point of feeling discouraged.

When we come to that point of feeling discouraged, of feeling that one is losing the battle against the destructive emotions, one is in a very vulnerable state because we can lose our determination to progress and we might feel a little bit stuck. To overcome such an obstacle to our progress it is very useful to contemplate two main points about how it is possible to overcome the destructive emotions. First of all it is good to contemplate on the fact, as explained in the teachings, that it is through familiarity that the mind becomes attuned to whatever frame of mind is maintained. That means that if we familiarise the mind in a positive way for long enough it can become as natural as the destructive emotions seem to be right now. It is a fact that because we have been familiar with the disturbing states of mind, disturbing emotions, it seems very natural to us them to be generated and maintained quite strongly in our mind. If, however, we familiarise our mind similarly with positive states of mind we can achieve a state where that becomes natural. A positive frame of mind and tranquillity and peace can become

natural as well.

The second important point to contemplate is, as explained in the teachings, that the very nature of the mind is actually pure. The real nature of the mind is pure and is not tainted with disturbing emotions. In other words, the disturbing emotions such as anger and desire and so forth are not the real nature of the mind. They are not really integrated with the nature of the mind. We will notice to a certain extent the reality and the truth of this view as we experience anger. If anger were the nature of our mind we would always be angry. If desire were the nature of our mind we would always be in a desirous state. But, as we notice from our own experience, even though the anger may be a very strong emotion and may become quite prevalent, nevertheless there are times when we don't experience anger. So it is a fact that anger is not in the nature of our mind, meaning it is not integrated into the nature of our mind. Thus anger can be removed. It can gradually be overcome. Contemplating on these facts can then help to restore our determination to progress and maintain enthusiasm.

The very term meditation, as mentioned earlier, means familiarising the mind in a positive way. Now there are numerous delusions within the mind. There are also different antidotes to overcome those particular delusions. Take, for example, jealousy. Jealousy is something that, when we experience it, brings unrest into our mind. As soon as we feel the pangs of jealousy it disturbs our mind. Jealousy is developed within ourselves and that emotion that is developed within ourselves, harms ourselves. It is something that contributes to a feeling of unrest and our mind becomes agitated. Anyone in a right frame of mind, who recognises that jealousy is harmful and brings unrest to the mind, would want to overcome that state of mind. This is done through meditating or contemplating on the disadvantages of jealousy and meditating on the opposite of jealousy within oneself. As we meditate on the disadvantages of jealousy and meditate on the opposite of negative states of mind we try to familiarise ourselves with the opposite of jealousy, non-jealousy, within one's mind. We slowly begin to reduce that state of mind that is controlled by jealousy. As we begin to experience reducing a jealous mind we begin to feel freed from that negative emotion within oneself and begin to feel more restful and feel happier and more peaceful in the mind. We will feel the benefit of having meditated or familiarised the mind in the positive attitude of non-jealousy, the opposite of jealousy. One experiences wellbeing of mind from overcoming that negative delusion. That is the practical benefit of meditating.

One of the reasons I particularly mention overcoming jealousy now is, that it is perhaps good that we prepare our mind in overcoming jealousy because the opportunity to feel jealous will arise soon when Christmas comes.... just joking. (*laughter*) Especially with all the lunches and dinners and parties it might be very easy for jealousy to arise in the mind.

Now let us actually engage in a few minutes of meditation. Let us bring our physical posture to an

upright and relaxed position and bring our mind inward, which means to distance our focus on the internal and external distractions and bring it inward. Having chosen our object for meditation, which is the breath, we bring our mind inward, focus on our natural breathing and try to maintain our focus 100% on the breath without being distracted by other thoughts or other things that may arise. If our mind is distracted we always bring it back onto the breath again. In this way, we'll spend a few minutes in meditation. (*Pause for meditation.*)

It would be good to meditate in a similar way on a regular basis. Even if it's for a short time, it's good to try to maintain that and try to engage in doing some meditation along with our worldly activities. I usually say that for people who are working and living in the world, even though the primary focus maybe on worldly concerns it is good to keep some sort of space and time for a spiritual practice.

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've come to the third subdivision in this category, which is gaining certainty in karma and its effects and how this becomes an aid to meditating on emptiness. The text here brings out a query or doubt that is raised by some. It states this doubt as, 'As I have gained an understanding of emptiness and can meditate on emptiness, I don't need to abide by the law of cause and effect or karma'. This is a very erroneous state of mind that may arise from not having a clear understanding.

The explanation in the teaching explains that the correct view actually should be the contrary. Having a real understanding of emptiness should contribute to affirming the need to abide by the law of cause and effect. The real understanding of emptiness means that one begins to realise that 'things' and all other phenomena are empty of what is called inherent existence, which means that it is empty of independent existence. When one gets a profound understanding of how things are empty of inherent existence, which means that things do not exist from their own side without having to depend on any cause and conditions, one understands that things lack that sort of existence and do not exist independently. One then develops the understanding that because they lack inherent existence, things are interdependent on causes and conditions for their existence. That helps one to understand that everything which exists is dependent on causes and conditions.

We can take a particular example to explain this further. We can take a tangible example such as form. When the teachings explain the emptiness of form, it is saying that form is empty of inherent existence, that is what form is empty of. In the teachings such as the *Heart Sutra* it gives a very simple description 'form is empty', however for someone who has an understanding of emptiness, that statement is understood not to be taken literally as to mean that form does not exist. That is not what is implied. When a teaching such as the *Heart Sutra* mentions 'form is empty' it is explaining specifically that form is empty of inherent existence. As one understands that form is empty of independent or inherent existence one comes to understand as an opposite of that, how form exists is in dependence to causes and conditions. That is how form does exist. Therefore that helps one to understand that form is dependent on its causes and effects as well.

The Tibetan word *ten-jung* is for the word 'dependent origination'. When things are explained as having dependent origination, it connotes that because things have dependent origination they lack inherent or independent existence.

The teaching quotes from a sutra that says that things are like an illusion and like the reflection of the moon in the water. The sutra is explaining with the analogy of a moon reflecting in the water that even though it appears as a moon it does not exist as a moon in the water. There's no actual moon existing there. This is explaining how things are empty of inherent existence. In the analogy of the reflection of the moon on the lake, we see the moon and it appears to be the actual moon but of course it is empty of being the moon. The reflection of the moon is not the moon. Likewise when we view things such as the self or others they appear to us as having independent existence. That's how it appears to us, but in reality these things do not exist independently.

The sutra further goes on to say that it is not the case that living beings who die and go on to the next lives are what we call of similar nature. What is being explained is that the beings who exist in this life and proceed on to future lives are beings who are also empty of independent existence. They don't inherently exist. There's a lack of inherent existence for beings who are living now and those who have gone to the next life, they are empty of inherent existence or having an independent self.

The sutra further goes on to explain that despite that being the case the karma that one possesses does not disappear. The virtuous and non-virtuous karmas give rise to its effects accordingly. The fact that things lack inherent or independent existence does not defy the workings of karma. When karma is created in this life the effect will be experienced in the future. A virtuous effect will be experienced from virtuous karma and a non-virtuous effect will be experienced from non-virtuous karmas. That definitely takes place.

Having explained that virtues and non-virtues give rise to their effects, the sutra further goes on to explain that 'this logical approach is sound', meaning that it is firm and stable, 'though subtle and difficult to see'. What is

being explained here is that though things lack inherent existence they still function and they still perform an action and this is something that is very subtle to understand. As explained in the teachings, gaining an understanding of emptiness strengthens the understanding of interdependence and gaining a profound understanding of interdependence stabilises and firms the understanding of emptiness. One understanding enhances the other. Interdependence and emptiness are not contradictory. Rather they are like two sides of the same coin. The understanding of emptiness enhances interdependence and that understanding of interdependence enhances understanding of emptiness. This is what is said to be profound, subtle and difficult to see. As it explains here in the sutra, 'it is within the scope of the Conqueror', meaning the Buddha.

The profundity of the explanation of the teaching on emptiness and the relationship between emptiness and interdependence is said to be really quite obscure and subtle. But once one gets an understanding of this, it is very important that one maintains that and establishes that within oneself well. It is said in that there are many who, when trying to understand emptiness lose the point of interdependence, and when understanding interdependence loses the point on emptiness.

The profundity of the understanding of emptiness and interdependence includes what we call understanding the cause and effect sequence of things and thus karma. To understand that emptiness and interdependence enhance each other and are not contradictory, is said to be the best way to please the buddhas. Having that understanding is one of the most profound understandings that one can gain from the teachings of the Buddha. To strive to understand the relationship between interdependence and emptiness is said to be really that most of importance for us to do. It is thus said, the utmost way to please the Buddha's mind is to gain the proper understanding of emptiness, because that is the main intention of the Buddha's teachings. Therefore, for those of us who have done some study and gained some understanding it is good to enhance it, especially for those who have studied the *Madhyamika* where this is explained in detail and quite extensively. This understanding is something really important for us.

I have explained my point of view. Does anyone have his or her point of view about this? Or any doubts or questions?

Question: Last week there was a question asked ... I can't remember exactly what the question was, but it was something to do with permanence and impermanence. Could you please elaborate on your description of permanence and impermanence please?

Your main question about permanence was how the mental image is considered as a permanent phenomenon. Geshe-la explains that the mental image is explained as a permanent phenomenon because it is a mere projection of the mind. It is a mere appearance to the conceptual mind, and does not relate to the actual function of the object. That is how it is said to be a permanent phenomenon.

Another way to understand the classification between permanent and impermanent phenomena would be that impermanent phenomena are something that are more tangible, something that we can work with, we can put hands-on and have an actual function. A permanent phenomenon does not have a particular function. If we take this cup as an example, the cup is said to be an impermanent phenomenon because it is something which is tangible. We can definitely see the functions of a cup and we can also see the changing nature of the cup. The image of the cup is something that is solely a conceptual projection that we cannot use in any way. The mental projection of a cup cannot function as a cup, cannot hold water or tea. It is a mere projection and has no real function as a cup.

Take the glass for example. The glass itself is an impermanent phenomenon but the conceptual image of the glass that we have in our mind when we think about the glass, is a permanent phenomenon. Another way to explain how the conceptual image of the glass is a permanent phenomenon is that even when the glass is destroyed because it is impermanent and can disintegrate, the conceptual image of the glass still remains. The conceptual image of the glass cannot be destroyed and will not fade away. That is how it is a permanent phenomenon.

The general definition of an impermanent phenomenon is that which has a changing nature and changes from moment to moment. That which does not change from moment to moment is a permanent phenomenon.

Question: The visual image of a cup could not act as a cup therefore it's a permanent phenomenon because its not the result of a function, therefore it cannot have a function. Is that what you meant by the analogy of the cup?

That's correct. It is a phenomenon that does exist. The conceptual mental image does exist however as it is not produced by any other phenomenon and, in itself, does not serve as a cause for any other phenomenon to be produced. It does exist but it was not produced and therefore not an effect of another earlier functional phenomenon. It does not serve a cause for a further functional phenomenon as well therefore it has to be concluded as a permanent phenomenon, something which exists but is not impermanent.

Does that help from to answer Ngawang's earlier question as well? If so, you may have a good sleep tonight. It seems to be a dilemma, that if you don't sleep that might disturb your partner but if you sleep too sound, that will also be not be accepted and you would have to be woken up.

Before we conclude the session for the evening let us take a few more minutes to again set our mind inward, finding the right physical position, relaxed and comfortable, and set our mind inward, focusing this time on the sound of the mantra of Buddha Shakyamuni as it is being recited.

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