
The Condensed Lam Rim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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As usual, it is good to spend a few minutes in meditation. For that purpose, we will sit in a comfortable, upright position.

The purpose of real meditation is, as we all know, to achieve a clear mind. If we have a clear mind, it contributes to our well-being. Having a happy mind, in particular, is something we all wish for.

Although we may wish to have a happy and clear mind, we may find that it is not so easy to achieve. When we look into the reasons, we find that it is because our mind is agitated most of the time. This comes about because of the disturbing attitudes that arise in the mind due to it being in contact with external distractions.

They are called 'external distractions' because they are things or object that we view 'out there'. One type of object that we come into contact may initially seem appealing to us and seem to contribute to our well-being. But in fact they disturb our mind. They may be appealing to us, which leads us to think they are a cause for happiness, but whether they actually serve as a cause for our happiness is doubtful.

The other type of external distraction occurs when we come into contact with objects that are not appealing or favourable. When we investigate the reaction we feel within ourselves, we notice that it is a feeling of aversion, of not wishing to be in contact with this unattractive object, of wishing to distance ourselves from it. When this feeling arises in the mind, there is an element of anger. As a result, our mind is disturbed, which contributes to us feeling unhappy.

When we see appealing objects, on the other hand, we feel a desire to be with that object or to possess that object. However, if we are unable to possess or be with that object – or even when we are able to come into contact with the object but it does not meet our expectations – again, as a result, our mind will feel uncomfortable, unhappy or even sad.

So, if we carefully analyse how the different emotions arise in our mind in relation to the objects we come into contact with, we will come to realise that the distracted mind – the mind that is constantly moving out towards objects of either attachment or aversion – is actually the cause of our restless, unhappy mind.

To counter this, we need to train our mind to temporarily distance itself from the objects of distraction and focus inward. Focusing inward on a virtuous or neutral object brings about a temporary calmness and peace in the mind. Meditation is slowly familiarising our mind with

this technique – focusing on a chosen object, distancing ourselves from the objects of distraction and focusing inward. This contributes to a real sense of wellbeing, to a happy and clear mind. When we identify the means for bringing about happiness and clarity in our mind, we also come to realise that we can achieve this through meditation.

To familiarise our mind with this technique of meditation, we will now spend a few minutes doing this meditation of focusing on the breath. So we again readjust our physical posture, sitting upright and comfortable, and most importantly we bring our mind inward, from the start of our meditation. It is very important that we bring the mind inward from the outset. If we do this half-heartedly, we will become accustomed to it and it will become a habit: whenever we do meditation, it will not be very focused and not very sincere. This is not useful in the long run for our development.

Therefore, from the moment we start, even if it's only for a few minutes, we will try to completely focus the mind inward, distancing ourselves from the objects of distraction, and focusing 100% on the breath, which is the object we are now focusing on. What we are actually doing is directing all of our mental energy onto one object. This is very effective because we are using the full potential of our mind to achieve something. When we channel our mental energy into focusing on one object, it is very effective. Normally, we are used to doing things half-heartedly – our mental energy is dispersed in many different directions, which is why we don't seem to achieve our long-lasting, desirable goals.

So we will spend a few minutes meditating. (*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

We left off from the earlier session with discussion of how, having identified non-virtuous karmas and the need to avoid non-virtuous action, we may find that due to habituation we continue to engage in certain negative actions.

When we notice this, we should not leave this situation as it is, but rather strive to purify the negative actions we have engaged in previously. The Buddha explained specific methods for purifying specific negative karmas. The downfalls or breaches of conduct in relation to vows that we have taken, are purified as explained in the

particular teachings on those vows. Here, it is explained how to purify general negative actions such as the ten non-virtues.

When we find that we have engaged in such negativities, we must purify the negative karmic imprints. Whenever we create negative karma, it contributes to the negative imprints in our mind and, although we may not realise it, these imprints are really the main factor contributing to all the confusion, frustration and unhappiness in our mind – they are the main obstacle to our happiness and wellbeing.

The good news is that they can be purified. The teachings mention that there are no good qualities of negative karma except for one, which is that it can be purified. This could be a good advertising slogan for negative karma – that it can be purified! We see TV ads where they advertise a certain kind of detergent saying: 'This is very good, this is powerful' while they show the detergent being used on stained laundry, which then becomes completely white and purified. It seems similar, in a way, to purifying negative karma.

Generally speaking, everyone wants to be considered a well-behaved, good-mannered person. We all want that, even more so when we come to realise the subtleties of negative karma. As a spiritual person who follows the dharma, we would definitely want to avoid negative karma and to engage in virtue. A dharma person is a person who constantly engages in virtue. However, even with that intention, we may find it very difficult to constantly engage in positive thoughts and deeds. We find that there are many other factors causing us to engage in negative deeds and thoughts. Again, this is because of our mind's strong familiarity with negativity. The negative mind is very strong within us.

There are two main contributing factors leading us into engaging in negativity. The primary factor is our own negative mind – imprints from the past such as anger, attachment, jealousy. Then there are external factors or conditions, such as the environment, the influence of friends and social pressure. These contributing factors, coupled with the negative imprints within our own mind, are the main reason we easily and uncontrollably engage in negativity. This is why the negative force is very strong within us. So this is something we need to deal with, firstly by identifying the negative mind, and then slowly putting effort into overcoming it.

Although we will find it difficult, it is something that we need to do. The difference between noble beings and ordinary beings is that noble beings have come to a point where they can naturally engage in positive action: they cannot be influenced internally or externally to engage in negative deeds. An ordinary being, on the other hand, is one who naturally seems to engage in negativities – who is easily influenced by external factors because of the internal factor of a negative mind. That is really the difference between a noble being and an ordinary being. So what we need to do is try to overcome that state of being an ordinary person with an ordinary state of mind and transforming it slowly into the mind of a most sublime, noble being. This is something we can strive to

do.

The teaching then describes the method for purifying negative karma. The most effective way to purify negative karma is through the means of applying the four opponent powers. Actually, this room was originally designed as a Catholic chapel, and the small room in the corner there was a purification room – what is called the confession room. But we may not be all able to fit in there right now! Also, I would not be able to get there myself through the corner door, which is next to the altar here. *(laughter)*

The four opponent powers are:

1. the power of regret
2. the power of the opponent force
3. the power of turning away from faults, or the resolution and
4. the power of the object, or reliance.

The various negative karmas to be purified are summarised in the text. We went over them earlier in detail, but we will summarise again those negative karmas that we should purify. These are the various types of negative karma we have created through the influence of the three poisons; any negative karma that we have created through our body, speech and mind, either individually through our body, speech or mind, or simultaneously through body, speech and mind; and negative karmas that we have encouraged others to engage in. As explained earlier, we not only create negative karma when we engage in non-virtue, but also when we encourage others to create negative karma. This creates negative karma for ourselves. We also create negative karma by rejoicing when others engage in negative deeds. Even though we may not have directly influenced and encouraged them to create negative karma, by the mere fact of having rejoiced and felt happy when others created negative karma is also a negative karma for ourselves.

All these types of negative karma are what we should purify.

The power of regret is where we bring to mind all the negative karmas we have created in past, since beginning less time. When the teaching mentions 'beginning less time', it refers to any negative karma that we may have created over infinite past lives, even actions we may not actually be able to remember. Because we have an infinite number of lifetimes, it is assumed that we have created all kinds of negative karma. So as well as the specific negative karma that we can recall from this lifetime, we include all the negative karmas that we could possibly have created in the past.

After reflecting on the fact that we have created so much negative karma in the past, we generate a sense of strong regret in our mind, which is intensified when we consider the negative consequences that these negative karmas will bring about. We should particularly reflect on the three main types of result that will be experienced – the ripened result of future lifetimes; the results which are similar to the cause; and the environmental results.

Reflecting on these results should bring about a strong feeling in our mind of not wishing to experience them, and thus a strong sense of regret about having created such karma.

If we take the non-virtuous act of killing, for example, when we reflect on the three types of negative result that would be experienced – the ripened results of future lifetime, the results similar to the cause and the environment results – this will bring about a great sense of regret for having engaged in the act of killing. As I have mentioned earlier, having a strong sense of regret is itself a very powerful way to help purify a strong amount of negative karma.

Having generated that regret, we engage in the actual means to purify – for example, as it mentions here in the text, reciting and reflecting on the Golden Light Sutra, (which I believe is translated in English. I'm not sure if it is translated to its entire length, however it's a very powerful sutra.) Also engaging in the *Thirty-five Buddhas* confession practice, which Lama Tsong Khapa himself engaged in by doing many hundred thousand prostrations, as a purification practice. This is a very powerful means to purify negative karma.

In other words, the opponent power of regret in itself does not become a means to *completely* purify the negative karma. One must then next engage in the actual practice of purifying it. This is where the next opponent power comes in, which is the power of opponent force. This means that we apply a direct opponent or antidote to overcome the negative karma for which we feel regret. Therefore the power of the opponent force serves as the means to actually purify the negative karma.

Although they will be explained later on, we will identify here the measure of having purified negative karma. When we engage in a strong practice to purify the negative karma, it can be completely purified so that we do not have to experience the negative consequences at all. If that measure has not been obtained, the effect of purification practice can be that we will not experience the full result of that negative karma, but experience only partial consequences in this lifetime, in a milder form. In some instances, negative karma can be purified to the extent that instead of experiencing a long-lasting negative result, the duration is shortened. These are measures of how negative karma is purified. More details about this will come later on.

There are six specific ways of purifying negative karma, which are the opponent forces:

1. reading profound sutras
2. meditating on emptiness
3. reciting mantras
4. making statues and images of the Buddhas, stupas and other holy objects
5. making offerings to holy objects, and
6. repeating the names of the Buddhas.

Profound sutras, refer to the Buddha's teachings. For example, the Heart Sutra is a profound sutra. Reciting or

reading here does not refer just to the mere reading of the words, but also to holding the words of the profound sutras in one's memory, and to contemplating the meaning of the words that one has held in one's memory – so actually memorising the words of the sutras and then reflecting on the meaning. If we take the example of a phrase from the Heart Sutra such as 'there is no form', we hold the words in our memory so that we can recall them, and then as we recite that words 'no form', we reflect on the meaning of those words: that 'no form' does not mean that there's no form at all, that form doesn't exist, but rather it refers to the fact that there's no inherently existing form. Form does not exist inherently or independently, so therefore it lacks independent or inherent existence. This is how we reflect on the meaning of those words.

Besides the specific list of purification practices given here, it is often explained that whatever virtue we do, with the proper intention, can be an opponent force or power for purifying negative karma. So we will end here. If there are any questions, we may refer to those questions, otherwise I can continue.

Question: Is the power of regret diminished by our inability to clearly remember our past lives?

Answer: One does not need to specifically remember incidents in one's conscious memory now. Even when we refer to our current situation as a human being, we find that there are so many negative karmas that we have created in this lifetime that we can remember, and that we still seem to naturally create them. So even with this good rebirth, we still find ourselves creating negative karma. However, in the past, we were definitely reborn in a situation where we naturally engaged in creating heavy negative karmas, such as we see other human beings doing now. So just at the level of being reborn as a human, we see many other humans now who are creating very heavy negative karmas, which we may have also created in the past out of ignorance.

The main point here is to assume that one has engaged in all these negative karmas and thus generate a strong sense of regret in one's mind. It is not necessary to remember the specific incidents. In other words, the power of regret is not diminished by not remembering the incident, but can be strengthened by generating a strong sense of the possibilities in one's mind.

Normally when one engages in a specific purification practice, it is very effective to try to imagine the negative karmas that one would have created in past lives, and then imagine that one's present body is representing all the other previous incarnations where one created negative karmas, which are now being purified by oneself. So we imagine the negative karmas we have created in the past, generating a strong sense of regret for all of those negative karmas. Then we think that the purification practice we engage in now is for the purpose of purifying all the negative karmas that we have ever created in the past. This then becomes a very powerful means to actually purify those negative karmas from the past.

Any further questions?

Question: What about when you are in a situation where negative things are going on and you ignore them rather than doing anything about it? Does this create negative karma?

Answer: Not rejoicing, but just sort of ignoring them? Here we have to look into the situation. If the other negativity is being created by someone with whom we have a connection or are able to influence them so that they do not do the negative

action, then for someone who has taken bodhisattva vows, as came up in our teachings earlier, it would be a fault not to stop them.

But generally, for those that we have no particular relationship with and with whom we cannot communicate about stopping the evil deeds – they may not even realise that they are creating negative deeds and will not accept if you tell them they are doing something negative, that they must stop. In fact, that might actually make them agitated and angry. So in this type of situation, where you cannot possibly do much about it, there's no fault in you just leaving it as it is, because you have not encouraged them to do the negative deed and you cannot stop them from doing it.

In some instances, as mentioned earlier, people may get upset when you try to tell them to stop doing something that is not good. For example, when parents try to stop their children doing negative things, the children may say: 'My parents are crazy, they don't want me to do certain things like partying or whatever'. So there are situations like that where if the others are not ready to accept, then trying to stop them will not be beneficial. It might just even temporarily worsen the situation.

Question: I was thinking about Albert Speer [a prominent architect and minister in Adolf Hitler's Third Reich and the only senior member of the Nazi Party to profess remorse for his actions after the war] who tried to ignore what was going on around him.

Answer: Of course it's hard to say what the situation was, but it could be a situation where someone did not have the ability to stop evil deeds or even if they had tried, it might have become a cause for something even more negative to happen. It's hard to say, generally speaking.

An example of trying to stop someone else from doing something negative is when we tell a child: 'You shouldn't kill that bug', and they have this curiosity and doubt in their mind, thinking: 'Why shouldn't I?'. It's hard for them to accept that. Whereas if you go to the trouble of explaining it more carefully by first asking them: 'Do you feel pain when a bug bites you?', and they would say yes, that they would feel pain. 'If you were to kill or hit a bug, then just as you would feel pain, they also feel that kind of pain, so for this reason it is not good to hit or kill a bug'. Then the children stop for a while and reflect because they can relate it to their own experience. So it is much easier to communicate to others in relation to their own experience. If it is not related to their experience, it will be hard for them to accept the explanation.

So for someone who does not accept or believe in the negative consequences of karma, it is hard to relay to them that they shouldn't create negative karma, because they just don't see the point. Whereas for those who have some understanding of the consequences of negative karma, where that understanding and belief becomes stronger, they will wish to refrain from negative karma and generating a strong sense of regret becomes easier and more powerful and more spontaneous.

Question: A famous philosopher said "for evil to prevail, a condition is for good men to sit back and do nothing". I served in two wars. What I was forced to do by my country I did because I believed that what my country asked me to do was justified. I regret any consequences of what I did, of bringing hardships on people. But if you know anything about the Korean War, you will know it brought peace on that peninsula for over 50 years. So my question is, should an ordinary man be held accountable for what a government has ordered him to do?

Answer: That point came up earlier when we were talking about the particular factors that make a karma complete or heavy. As was explained, when you are in a situation like that where you are drafted and have to go to war and your situation is quite

involuntarily, because one is still an agent of the action, there is some negative karma. But because one does not have full responsibility – the action is not done completely from one's own intention – the negative karma is much less.

The only factor here which Geshe-la is not sure about is that when you go to into the army, whether you have intentionally made certain kinds of promises to serve the country, such as having to kill. One is expected by one's superiors to abide by that promise in one's heart and live up to that ideal, but of course there is a factor here of a personal responsibility one has taken upon oneself. Otherwise, for any negative action that an individual engages in, which is done involuntarily, the negative karma is much, much less. It does not become a complete karma.

The example you have raised is similar to releasing someone from prison. If someone is imprisoned, and if that person could lead a decent life and be a good person after they are released from prison, then by all means, one should try to help them to be released from prison. If one has influence to be able to do that, one should engage in doing that. However, if one knows from previous records of the person's behavior that after that person is released, they would harm many others, then one should not attempt to free them from prison.

The situation of going to war is similar. If the real intention is to benefit many people, it might be justified. When we talk about karma, if one were to go to war to benefit a large number of people, even though the negative karma of killing someone in that process will be there, because there's the bigger benefit for many others, some sort of good comes out of that. To give another example, if by killing one person it would save a thousand people, while killing that one person is still a negative deed, a negative karma, the good that comes out of it outweighs the negative karma that one creates. That is how one should understand it.

Also, the intentions of the politicians and those who wage war on others has to be questioned. For example, the current war in Iraq was proclaimed as being a war to bring about freedom, to bring about peace in the country, but where can we see the peace now? How many people are continuously suffering there? So just because some politicians claim it is a just war, the real intention is questionable. One has to really go deeper into the motives before we can justify anything.

Question: Did you have in mind that the Lord Buddha had to kill the captain of a boat in one of his past lives?

Answer: That is exactly as Geshe-la mentioned earlier on. So that was a good question you asked, a question for us to ponder on. Thank-you. When good questions are asked, questions with a lot of meaning, and something to ponder on, it actually brings interest for everyone. It helps everyone to think and to learn from it. I'm not saying that I'm giving appropriate answers to all your questions, but nevertheless, the question itself is valid, in the sense of bringing a wider interest for everyone. I appreciate it when such questions are asked. There are some who claim that there have been good questions asked, but that Geshe-la didn't give very good answers!

Before we end the session, we will take a few minutes to engage in some meditation again. This time, as we sit in an upright and comfortable position, we bring our mind inward and focus on the sound of the mantra of Buddha Shakyamuni.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

Edited Version

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