
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. For that purpose, we will sit in a relaxed comfortable posture.

It is also important to set a good motivation, which can be summarised as generating an attitude of wishing to benefit other beings. Whatever action we engage in, if we have the basic attitude 'May whatever I do become a cause to benefit others', then naturally, as a consequence, whatever we do will be beneficial. Even for normal activities such as communicating or associating with others, if we have the attitude of wishing to benefit them, then whatever communication or association we have with them naturally becomes beneficial.

If we look further into it, this attitude is based on love and compassion, followed by a concern for others. If we have this basic attitude of love and compassion imbued with a concern for others, our communication and association with others will be fruitful.

This is not to say that when we associate with others there will not be disagreements or disputes. These will naturally arise because we all hold different opinions. When there are different opinions, naturally there will also be disagreement. However, if the disagreement is based upon a loving, compassionate attitude and the wish to benefit others, it will not disrupt our general well-being. Despite the disagreement and different opinions, the end result would be fruitful, because it would be based on a loving, compassionate attitude. In any activity, such as communication with others, if we need to express a different opinion to others in order to set things right, then because that opinion is based on love, compassion and concern for the other – and not based merely on self interest – the ultimate result would be fruitful.

However, if we lack that loving, compassionate attitude and concern for others, we may find that a disagreement will lead to a real dispute and disruption in the mind; this comes about if one's interest is only for oneself. If we relate to others only out of a selfish interest, for our own gain – disregarding others and using language and opinions designed only for our own gain – this will lead to more complications and disturbances. That sort of activity will be regarded as selfish behaviour. Whereas if we have genuine love and concern for the other based on love and compassion towards them, even when there's difficulty in the beginning with our communication, it can eventually be straightened out.

In a relationship between two people, if the relationship is based on mutual concern and a genuine loving, compassionate attitude on both sides, then even if there are disagreements or different opinions, these will not

harm the relationship, because each person has a genuine interest in the other's well-being. However, if a relationship lacks genuine concern, love and compassion from both sides, when disagreements or arguments arise, these will definitely lead to more hostility. Then arguments and different opinions will arise with an attitude of wishing to harm the other. This attitude arises due to the absence of real concern, love and compassion for the other. So when the wish to harm the other arises in the mind – from either side – that will definitely harm the relationship and ultimately ruin it.

I am reminding you, from your side as listeners, to generate a good motivation in the mind, based on love and compassion, a wish to benefit others. Likewise from my own side – the teacher's side – I will develop that good attitude in my mind, as much as I can, when I engage in a session of teaching. Having taken that attitude, I try to share the teachings with you. Whether it actually benefits you or not is another matter – that is up to you. The reason why I mention this is because, when we talk about benefiting someone, we have to take into account the long-term benefit: the benefit may not be seen or felt immediately, because the real benefit we are talking about here is long-term. Whether this substantial benefit for the future comes about or not depends on many factors coming together. That's why I say it is hard to predict whether my act of teaching will benefit someone or not.

However from my own side, from my own experience, I feel that when I develop an attitude of wishing to benefit others, at least my mind feels peaceful. I feel rest assured that as far as my attitude is concerned, I have an attitude of wishing to benefit others, which for me definitely brings some sort of solace and peace of mind. That should be true for anyone who familiarises themselves with generating that attitude: the mind will seem to naturally become more peaceful and calm, which will actually benefit one.

On a practical level, generating an attitude of wishing to benefit another, and trying to cultivate a genuine concern for the other seems to sometimes have an effect on the other person – they will become more gentle too, more calm and relaxed. Similarly, when the other has a good attitude based on love and concern, it seems to really benefit oneself. So two people can definitely derive mutual benefit from such an attitude. If a person we are close to – the person we live with or with whom we associate daily – begins to develop a genuine sense of concern for us, we begin to feel it. We feel secure within ourselves because we can feel the genuine love the other has for us; it gives us a sense of relief and security. We can feel that it is definitely of mutual benefit.

When we translate this to a larger scale, we can then see that within a nation or country, if people are naturally kind to each other, or at the very least don't harm each other, and everyone in that country is brought up with these moral principles of being considerate to others, we see that as a result, that nation will be considered by the rest of the world as a country that is both comfortable and relatively peaceful. So we can definitely see that, on a

larger scale, whole nations benefit when people practise genuine concern for each other.

However, the opposite is also true. If the people within a country lack the moral principle of consideration and concern for each other, that country would become a country in turmoil. People would be always doubting and mistrusting each other, even going out of their way to harm each other. Such a country would not be seen as peaceful and as providing a good living environment.

So if we can see the benefit and value of having consideration for others, we should be inspired to practise it, again beginning with the very people with whom we live and associate every day. Our practice with them will then lead to greater achievements.

Having explained the positive attitude one should adopt, we come to the actual practice of meditation. Contemplative meditation is where we choose an internal object on which to focus. Having chosen an internal object, we bring the focus of our mind towards the object. This means distancing ourselves from the normal distractions and thoughts that arise in our mind, not letting our mind to be influenced by these and other external distractions, but rather keeping it focused on the internal object we have chosen for our meditation.

The practical benefit one derives from keeping the mind focused on the internal object single-pointedly is that one will notice that the mind immediately becomes calmer and more peaceful; as a result, it becomes clearer and more focused. This happens because the mind is diverted from disturbing thoughts. The reason why we often end up feeling frustrated and confused is that we usually put our attention and focus on disturbing states of mind. If something is disturbing the mind, by focusing on it, we escalate that disturbance – we fuel it. The more we focus on the negative or disturbing state of mind, the more disturbed our mind will become. Thus we end up feeling frustrated, confused and depressed.

Conversely, when we bring our attention and focus to a neutral or virtuous internal object, we are diverting our mind and distancing it from disturbing thoughts. As a result, we feel immediate relief. When we continuously put effort into familiarising our mind with focusing on an internal object, our mind will feel more and more relaxed, more and more focused. When the mind becomes clear and focused, we can then use it in a positive way to overcome our difficulties and problems.

It is very important to know the actual technique from the outset. If you don't have the right technique from the outset, you could be wasting lots of time and energy in trying to achieve something that is not achievable because you are using the wrong technique. As mentioned previously, the technique involves distancing our mind from disturbing attitudes or any kind of distraction, such as thoughts from the past or future. Then we keep our mind focused on the chosen object. In this case, the object is our breath. We must really put effort into focusing on our breath, being determined to keep the mind focused on the breath. It need not be for long: as beginners, we wouldn't be able to focus on the breath for a long time. The main point is to keep the mind focused on the breath, even if it's only for a few seconds.

If we initially begin our meditation half-heartedly, taking it too easy and thinking that whatever comes is fine, we will form a habit of being half-distracted whenever we go into meditation. As a result, whenever we tried to meditate, our mind would be habituated to being distracted. Maybe we would be half-focused on the object; if we felt satisfied with being half-focused on the object, we would never be able to completely single-pointedly focus on any object, because our mind is habituated to something else. When that sort of habit formed, it would become ingrained in us. We might even believe that we were meditating whenever we sat rigidly in an upright position, calmly and peacefully in a quiet environment; but because of the habit mentioned earlier, our mind would be distracted all the time. Even if we thought we were doing meditation, we would never be able to achieve the result, because our mind would be in a distracted state.

The main point here is that it is very important to form the positive habit of keeping our mind focused, even for a few moments, at the beginning. When we begin our meditation, we make the determination 'For the next few moments, I'll keep my mind focused. I'll distance my mind from every distraction and keep it focused only on my breath'. Then, keep the mind focused on the natural inflow and outflow of our breath. (*Pause for meditation*)

That should be sufficient for now.

Before I proceed with the text, I forgot to mention an important point from the earlier translation. Geshe-la mentioned the meditation practice of focusing on the object: if one familiarises oneself by focusing single-pointedly on the object even for a few moments, one does not have to feel that this is inadequate. Rather, by forming the good habit of focusing even for a few moments, one can slowly increase one's focus for a longer duration. But trying to meditate for a long duration from the beginning is unrealistic.

(*Interjection by Geshe-la*) If someone can focus single-pointedly for a long duration from the outset, that's wonderful! (*laughter*) I'm not discouraging you from meditating single-pointedly for a long duration, if you can manage it. But the advice here is for beginners who are not able to initially focus for a long time. You need not force yourself in trying to focus for long time; it is more important to maintain a single pointed focus, even if it is for a short duration. The quality is much more important than the quantity.

4.2.2.1.2 The actual way to take the essence

4.2.2.1.2.2 Training the mind in the stages of the path held in common with beings of the medium scope

4.2.2.1.2.2.1 The actual training in the reflections: the way to develop the mind that longs for liberation

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.1 Reflection on the truth of suffering – the faults of cyclic existence

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.1.2 The actual meditation on suffering

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.1.2.1 Reflecting on the actual sufferings of cyclic existence

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.1.2.1.2 Reflecting on the six sufferings

We have been discussing the general faults of cyclic existence. Under this outline of the general faults of cyclic existence, there is a category of the six faults of cyclic

existence. We have come to the *fifth fault*, which is the fault of *repeatedly descending from high to low*. This means the suffering of the instability of going from high positions to low.

This fault is related to the uncertainty of any position one may have achieved in life. While it can relate to the uncertainty of position from a past life to a future life, even in this very lifetime, we can see that there are many people in high positions who later find themselves in the lowest of positions. For example, kings or rulers who once had power and sovereignty over others, because of changing circumstances, can later become a prisoner in jail. Imagine the suffering experienced in that person's mind – someone who was once a majestic ruler later being treated as a prisoner and treated very badly, even tortured in prison. In that kind of situation, that person experiences so much suffering.

Even in one's own life, there may be many circumstances where once when things were going very well: job-wise having had a good position, likewise with knowledge, health and so forth. But then when the situation changed, things went wrong. One can lose one's wealth, position, knowledge or health at any time when the circumstances change. When that is experienced, the sufferings are as great as when someone from a high position falls to a lower one. When one loses what one had before, that suffering can become unbearable. We notice that many people complain about this type of suffering of losing what they had before. If we don't see this as a fault, what happens is that we become attached to a high position. When we are in a good position – having wealth, status and so forth – we become very attached to it and can develop pride. The stronger the attachment one has to that position, the greater the pride, and the more suffering one will experience when one loses that.

Similarly, if someone is in a lower position, then because of that situation, they may become depressed. Feeling depressed and losing all hope and courage when in a low position, is another extreme that brings about much suffering. Thus one must begin to realise that this is the reality of life: the fault of being attached to a high position at one extreme, and being completely discouraged or losing self-esteem and self-confidence when in a low position at the other extreme. Due to attachment to a high position and aversion to a low position, one can experience a lot of suffering when the situation changes.

Another fault that can arise is that when one is in a high position, due to pride one may develop a sense of looking down upon others and disparage them. Also, if there are others in higher positions, one may feel discomfort, because of jealousy, envy and so forth. Being attached to the position can lead to negative states of mind, such as disparaging or ridiculing those who are in a lower position, and feeling envy, prejudice or jealousy towards those in a higher position. These faults again arise from attachment to a high position.

We need to train our mind to see the reality of being in cyclic existence, which means that positions can change from higher to lower. From this, what we can understand at a practical level is that because this is the nature of cyclic existence, we should not be too attached to a high

position when we are in a high position and things are going well, and not feel too discouraged or completely lose our self-esteem when we are in a low position and try to lift ourselves up from that. In that way, we can maintain equilibrium in our mind. That sort of attitude would be a practical way to benefit our life.

From the actual practice point of view, the reason why we contemplate the different sufferings – particularly the fault of repeatedly descending from high to low – is to develop a sense of renunciation towards cyclic existence and samsaric pleasures. Renunciation here means feeling distaste for cyclic existence. When one develops a sense of distaste for cyclic existence, the wish to be free from cyclic existence can arise in one's mind and one can strive for liberation, which is the ultimate goal of understanding these points and practising them. Again, at a practical level, we can begin to see the reality of how a high position is not stable and can descend to a low one, and vice versa.

Particularly in relation to the high position, we can see that it can change at any moment, so even with a high position, one could lose everything and fall to a low position. Once we remind ourselves of that again and again, it helps our mind to lessen the strong longing for and attachment to a high position and everything it entails, such as wealth and status. The less attachment and desire we have towards a high position, the less suffering we will experience in relation to that.

As the teaching explains, if we have strong attachment towards samsaric pleasures, particularly those associated with high positions, this will ultimately lead to a downfall. The stronger the attachment we have towards the pleasures of cyclic existence – which will ultimately lead to a downfall – the more we will experience the negative consequences.

The text here quotes a passage where the Buddha said that if one has strong attachment towards the pleasures of cycle existence, that will only lead to disappointment and much more suffering at the end. In a sutra the Buddha said:

The end of accumulated things is depletion.

The end of things that are high is a fall.

The end of meetings is separation.

The end of life is death.

This particular passage from the Buddha relates to a story about four people. One was very attached to accumulating wealth; his main goal in life was to accumulate as much wealth as possible. The next person wanted to reach a high status and become famous. The third person was attached to friendship and having good companions; that was his main goal, and all his activity and energy was focused on gaining good relationships. The fourth person's main goal in life was to have a long life; he put all his energy and effort into trying to acquire the elixir of immortality in order to have a very long life. They then obtained their goals; the first person became very wealthy. The second person obtained a high status. The third one obtained a good relationship, and the fourth one acquired the elixir for long life. However, at that time, the ruler of their country snatched everything from them: the wealth of the first was taken away, the

high status of the second was destroyed, the companionships enjoyed by the third were broken up, and the elixir to have long life of the fourth person was taken away.

The first line of passage of the Buddha's, which says that all accumulation results in depletion – indicating that, in relation to the first person, no matter how much wealth one acquires, the very nature of accumulation means that it has to be depleted or exhausted. All the wealth one acquires eventually has to be exhausted. This first line helps us on a practical level because if we can understand this as being the reality – that the nature of whatever is to be accumulated is that it will have to be depleted at one time or another – this will help our mind to be less attached to acquiring a lot of wealth. Even though we need to acquire wealth in order to use it in a good way, if we have excessive attachment and think that whatever we accumulate will last forever, this exaggerated view can be removed, and we can thus remove the suffering that comes with that unrealistic view.

The second line from the passage says that the end of things that are high is a fall. In this line, the Buddha is saying that the reality or natural consequence of things being high is that they will naturally have a fall to a lower position. When the Buddha taught this, it was taught in relation to the earlier story, about the person who was attached to high status and who put all their effort and energy into obtaining a high status. If one puts all one's energy and effort into obtaining a high status without realising that there will be a fall, then as mentioned there will be great suffering from disappointment when a fall does occur. Thus, the understanding one gains from this line is not to be attached to high status.

The third line in this passage says that the end of all meeting is separation. The Buddha was pointing out the reality that the end result of all meeting, all acquaintances, all coming together is that there will be a separation. Again in relation to the story of the four people, for anyone excessively attached to a relationship, with that excessive attachment will come the unrealistic view that a good relationship will always last. Again, the suffering of disappointment will come when separation takes place. From the very outset, one must understand that all relationships, no matter how good, will end in separation at one time or another, sooner or later there will be separation. With that understanding, rather than feeling discouragement when separation occurs, the mind will not be excessively attached because it understands the reality of the situation.

The fourth line in this passage is that the end of all life is death. That again is another reality: for everyone who is born, the end result is to experience death. That is the natural consequence of life.

This understanding will help us initially on a practical level to accept whatever situation we are experiencing in our life. But most importantly, it will help us to generate a strong sense of aspiration or determination to achieve liberation, a state where one will be free from all of these situations or conditions. When we relate this to our own experience, we can see for ourselves that by failing to see these situations as a reality, we bring a lot of

disappointment and suffering to our mind to our mind because of our wrong views.

We can conclude here for the evening. Before we actually conclude this session, we can take a few moments again to focus the mind. This time we can again sit in a relaxed, appropriate posture, distancing our mind from all distractions and focusing on the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. We shall try to keep our mind focused one hundred percent on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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