
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 some time in meditation, so for that purpose let us sit in a comfortable but upright position. Likewise it would be appropriate to set a positive attitude in one's mind for doing the practice. One can think in the following manner, 'In order to help other beings I need to first of all subdue my own mind, that is, to overcome the disturbing states and attitudes in my own mind and bring it to a completely peaceful state. Once I achieve that, then I can benefit others. So for that purpose I will engage in the practice of meditation now'.

As we set a positive attitude for our meditation, we also become aware of how useful and practical this sort of attitude is for our actual practice, particularly when we relate it to our own experiences. The purpose of our practice becomes much more relevant when we reflect on our attitude. Without a peaceful and calm mind ourselves, it is not possible to help others be peaceful. If one wants to bring about peace and calm for others one must begin with bringing peace and tranquillity to one's own mind. Along with developing a calm and peaceful state of mind it is most important to develop a kind and compassionate attitude towards others. One cannot possibly help others in a significant way without the qualities of a tranquil mind combined with a compassionate loving attitude towards others.

When we think further about the reasons why we cannot help others let us consider the fact that when one's mind is in turmoil, the opposite of a peaceful and tranquil state, then we can not even help ourselves. We find that it really disturbs us when our mind is agitated and full of turmoil. As we suffer, it is so hard to help oneself in that state of mind, let alone trying to help others. In order to really benefit and help others, one must first begin by developing a calm and peaceful state of mind within oneself. When we think about these facts, then we come to understand what it means when the teachings say that one's own happiness and wellbeing are dependent on one's mind.

Having explained how one begins by trying to bring one's own mind into a peaceful and tranquil state before we can even attempt to help others, we now look into how that is done. With mindfulness and introspection, first of all we look into what makes our mind agitated and frustrated. What contributes to the frustration and agitation in the mind? What influences the mind to be completely distracted with thoughts and ideas of all sorts? Allowing the mind to follow distractions, we notice that the more distracted the mind is the more it is confused and frustrated. One cannot possibly handle too many things going on in the mind. When we allow the

mind to follow all the whims and thoughts that arise, then that contributes to the distractions in the mind. The greater the distraction in the mind, the more confused and disturbed the mind naturally becomes.

The technique we use here is to withdraw the mind from all distractions. So we temporarily distance our mind from all discursive thoughts and distractions and bring the mind inward and focus on a chosen object; keep the mind focused on that. As the mind focuses on a particular chosen object and maintains that focus, then the mind naturally will calm down and become relatively peaceful. This is the process of how we can bring our mind to a more peaceful state.

One may come to think that it is an advantage for the mind to be focused outward, as all these thoughts one has are in relation to plans for the future and so forth. The reason we allow ourselves to follow our thoughts, is because we believe that by doing so we will achieve some sort of satisfaction for oneself. We may believe that having discursive thoughts is a means to better one's life and conditions. If it were true, however, that allowing ourselves to be influenced by all the distractions brings about satisfaction and some contentment for oneself, then we would by now have developed a real sense of deep contentment and satisfaction within ourselves. That's what we have been doing for many past lives and for as long as we can remember in this life. We would by now have achieved some level of satisfaction and contentment.

But have we found some satisfaction and contentment within ourselves? We can find the answer as we look into our own state of mind right now. When we settle down a bit and look into ourselves, when we take a break from all the discursive thoughts and busyness in our mind – and ask ourselves what have we gained from all this thinking process so far? Have we gained any real satisfaction and contentment? Discursive thoughts are focused only outwardly, completely distracted by worldly concerns. Have we gained some contentment and satisfaction by allowing our minds to be influenced in that way? If the answer is that we actually feel empty within, having no real sense of contentment and satisfaction, then we have not gained anything really beneficial by allowing our minds to be distracted. Thus allowing the mind to be distracted is not the real means to gain contentment and satisfaction within oneself.

The main point being stressed here is that as we investigate within ourselves and look into ourselves to see whether we have gained anything from allowing our minds to be completely influenced by the distractions, we find that we have not gained any contentment. Instead we have an empty feeling. One may reach a point when one feels completely lost, having no sense of direction in life. Not even being clear about what one wants, and being in a completely chaotic state of mind. That happens when one suddenly feels as though one has lost all sense of direction and hope in life. A depressed state of mind is a result of allowing the mind to become completely influenced by the distractions. When we come to notice that for ourselves, then we begin to wonder if there could be another technique, another way to gain real contentment and satisfaction within oneself. Then one

begins to find the spiritual practice, particularly the meditation practice as a really useful technique to gain real satisfaction within. The main point here is that by investigating within oneself, and checking up for oneself, we begin to notice that what we have been doing so far, just allowing our minds to be completely distracted, has not been successful. So, one comes in touch with other techniques such as meditation.

The practice of meditation, being a unique technique and method, is understood by those who have access to the teachings, having heard the instructions on meditation then contemplated the benefits of meditation and have tried some meditation for awhile. We can feel assured that when all the other normal worldly techniques of gaining satisfaction and contentment don't work, then this unique technique of spiritual practice, in this particular case meditation is the way to happiness.

However, even those who do not have access to spiritual training, let alone Buddhist teachings, but any spiritual practice, also come to a point where they feel that having access to all material things such as wealth does not seem to give them fulfilment in their life. People have related this to me personally. When I go out for meals, some who I meet confide in me that they are not really religious, however they come up to me and explain their difficult situations in life. They say that they have wealth and have earned a lot of money in their careers and so forth, but somehow they feel that they lack inner contentment, inner peace of mind, and have an empty feeling inside them. They confide in me that they feel completely bogged down with worldly activities of having to go to work, spending all their time and energy just working. While they have money, they say that they still have to go to work because they have to continue earning money. They feel completely caught in this vicious circle where they exert so much energy and time in acquiring money and wealth, but even when they get it they don't feel satisfied in their mind; there is still an empty feeling.

Even though they don't have any real spiritual training, they come to the conclusions that maybe the solution is to go out into the forest or some sort of solitary place where there is no TV, no distractions at all and without any material objects, just remain completely in solitude without anything, and that maybe will bring real satisfaction and contentment in the mind. They come up with these conclusions themselves. Of course from the spiritual teachings we understand that just to go into solitary seclusion without any training and without knowing what to do with one's mind does not bring a lasting solution. Because, the real technique is to train the mind and use it to gain real satisfaction and contentment.

We do not deny the fact that there are external factors that contribute to our wellbeing. As well as internal factors, the external factors do contribute to a certain amount of well being physically, however the inner satisfaction that we need to gain has to be obtained or developed internally within one's own mind.

What contributes to the disturbance within our mind is also twofold: the external as well as the internal. If one fails to understand how all the disturbances within oneself - the empty feeling and all the frustrations and

depressed state of mind - are not only due to the external factors, then one is coming to the wrong conclusion. Some may conclude that by trying to distance oneself from merely the external distractions, then that would bring some inner satisfaction and contentment. However, just distancing oneself from the outside world without working internally within one's mind to bring about some real satisfaction and contentment, will not bring about this natural peace and calmness within one's mind. This is because it is a twofold combination of the external objects of indulgence and the mind which goes out towards these objects. Indulgence in the objects of sensual pleasures comes from the mind, so if one does not control the mind and allows the mind to go out into the external objects, then that combination brings disturbance to the mind. So, one must work on both levels, most importantly working within one's own mind.

We can spend the next few minutes attempting to keep our mind focused on our breath. The technique involves making mental decisions that for the next few minutes I will not allow my mind to be influenced by any distractions whether they are discursive thoughts relating to the past or future or any other kind of distractions that may come up in the mind. Not allowing the mind to be influenced by that but rather making a strong determination to keep the focus of one's mind upon the breath. The breathing itself should be natural and not laboured and heavy, but also not shallow. Inhaling and exhaling should be in a natural rhythm, not breathing in taking very deep breaths and then holding it for a while then breathing out slowly or forcefully, but just the natural rhythm of the breath, inhaling and exhaling naturally. Just keeping the mind focused on the breath, following it coming in and going out and maintaining our focus just on that. *(pause for meditation)*

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 covering the six types of general suffering that are experienced in cyclic existence. Within the six types of suffering we have covered the first five which are listed as faults. The sixth one is the fault of having no companions. The text quotes from another great master's work, Shantideva's *Engaging in the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, which reads,

This body comes forth whole, yet
The bone, the flesh that accompanies it
Will break apart and disperse. As this is so,
Why mention others such as loved ones?

As quoted from this great master, when we reflect on the meaning of these lines it becomes really very vivid and true of reality. As the first two lines mention, the body, even though it is born whole with all of the things that

accompany it such as the bones, the flesh, and all the rest that makes the body whole, will have to separate one day and slowly decay. Finally, when we meet death it will completely decompose. When this very body that we are born with naturally falls apart, then there is no need to mention the companions and loved ones that we meet along the way. It is very useful for the mind when we reflect on the reality of the situation, as it helps the mind not to be excessively attached to companions. When we come to realise that the reality of being in cyclic existence is that we have to be alone some day, and even though this is experienced as suffering, when we acknowledge it and realise that this is the reality, it helps the mind to not become too overwhelmed when that separation actually takes place.

Another verse from the same master says,

You are born alone.
Also you die alone.
As others cannot share your suffering,
Of what use is the hindrance of loved ones?

What is being explained here is very clear. One is born alone and then at the end of one's life one has to die alone. That is something that one has to experience completely by oneself and cannot be shared with others. No one can share the suffering of having been born, and when we die that experience of suffering cannot be shared with anyone else. What real value is there in loved ones if they cannot really assist us in relieving our suffering? So, why pay so much attention to loved ones now, as it will only bring about more suffering in the future? Reflecting on these points really brings an understanding within oneself not to be excessively attached to companions, as one will not have them as companions later on; it just brings more suffering of loneliness.

The result of having trained the mind to reflect upon this reality is that one will reduce strong attachment to excessive desire and attachment to companionship. So when we have to experience death, the mind will not be overly saddened with the reality of having to depart from this world and actually physically having to leave all our companions behind. Because of the previous training of one's mind, death can actually be experienced with a joyful state of mind, of acceptance. Whether one accepts a future life or not, if one can train one's mind now in reducing excessive attachment towards one's loved ones, then that can definitely help for the mind to be at ease when one has to experience death.

We definitely notice the difference, whether someone has been religious or not, if we know they have been training their mind and not been excessively attached to their objects or friends; when such a person dies, we can see that they have a joyful mind and they seem to be able to easily let go. Most importantly, as we train our mind to lessen our attachment, the most important thing is to train our mind to be really considerate and compassionate towards others and having a loving attitude towards them. That is something that will definitely help us, particularly at the time of death. If we have trained our mind to be familiar with a loving and compassionate attitude, that will definitely bring the

mind of peace, especially at the time of death. The mind will be joyous one. Contrary to that, when there is excessive attachment, then it is very hard to let go and then the mind will be in turmoil. The suffering that is explained here of having no companions will actually be experienced quite severely at that time.

As the teachings explain, if the mind is at ease in a joyful state when we die, then naturally the next life will be a joyful and peaceful one, because what goes along after death is the qualities in the mind. So whatever qualities we have gained through our training and practice now, such as developing detachment and a loving and compassionate attitude, then that is something which goes with our mind at death; these qualities survive and go along to the next life.

If we were to relate that to our experience now, we will notice that if we go to bed in a happy, peaceful state of mind, then naturally the next morning we wake up quite happy and joyful and we may remain happy and joyful the whole day. When our mind is in this state, then as a result we are happy and joyful too. That is because of the connection between the state of our mind and ourselves; what we experience in our mind reflects upon our wellbeing. When we go to bed, that continuity of a peaceful and calm state of mind carries on throughout the night to be experienced as an effect the next morning and so we benefit from that. We benefit from the previous night's mind being at rest and at peace; it helps the mind to be fresh and peaceful the next day. With that experience with sleep now, we can get a glimpse of how that is similar over lifetimes too.

That covers the six general types of sufferings or faults of cyclic existence.

The next section in the text is how all of these six can be combined into three main sufferings. Being aware of these explanations and reflecting upon them can help our mind, however the main tool in our everyday life comes down to two essential things. As the great Indian master Atisha has mentioned, the main tools that we can use in our everyday lives to transform ourselves are mindfulness and introspection. These are the two main tools that can guide us throughout our lives, as mindfulness and introspection are states of mind that constantly help us to analyse and to look into what we are doing and thinking. As long as we maintain mindfulness and introspection, we will always be aware of our thoughts and activities. So when we notice we have a negative thought that leads to negative actions, we will be able to refrain from it.

The way to be aware of it is to maintain mindfulness and introspection. In everyday life when we notice that something is very harmful for us or others, we will not purposefully engage in doing something harmful, would we? Similarly, on a subtler level in relation to karma, what we call very subtle negative thoughts that lead to negative actions can be avoided if we are aware of them. Mindfulness and introspection help us to maintain our awareness. This is something that people from normal walks of life, even though they do not consider themselves religious, have mentioned to me, that they find them very useful tools. What we call mindfulness

and introspection relates to being mindful of virtuous states of mind and not forgetting that.

Without mindfulness and introspection our mind may become complacent and negative states of mind such as anger can arise. When we are angry with someone, at that moment we are lacking a compassionate attitude towards the other; it is replaced with anger. Even though normally we would consider that person as a friend or companion and have concern and love for them, in that moment of anger because we have not been mindful of our compassionate attitude towards them, we may wish to harm them. Anger arises only when the compassionate attitude is not present, so while we experience compassion towards others, we cannot feel angry at the same time towards them.

Question: The teachings talk about developing equanimity towards friends, enemies and strangers. However there are times when I feel that I am my own enemy, and at other times I feel like a stranger to myself. Can Geshe-la comment on this?

We can definitely relate to that feeling or situation. As explained in the teachings, the Buddha himself and the other great Indian master Lopon Pawo has mentioned that one can be one's own enemy while one can be one's own friend. That explicitly mentions how, depending on what things we focus upon within oneself, when we are influenced by the delusions and negative emotions within oneself, then it is as if one has become one's own enemy; if one allows oneself to be influenced by that, it destroys one's peace and calmness. Whereas if we focus on the good qualities within oneself, then because those qualities come from within one's own mind, we become our own best friend. This is precisely how we relate to it in our practice. The main thing is how to identify what is called an enemy and what is called a friend within oneself.

According to the first Dalai Lama Gyalwa Gendun Drup in one of his works, the meaning of the quote is basically how, if we really take time to analyse and investigate within oneself, the real enemy is to be found within oneself, not externally. Thus one has to exert enthusiasm to overcome the enemy that is within.

Question: Earlier in the teaching, Geshe-la mentioned about the suffering of having to be born and to die alone. However isn't the case that our mother was present when we born, and also other people such as doctors etc?

Was your mother born with you though? At the time there could be many surrounding one. What it relates to is having an experience just by oneself. At the time of being born, even relating to the physical aspect, one is born alone from the mother's womb at that time. Basically what it relates to is having to experience that just by oneself. In relation to the actual physical surroundings, yes as you rightly mention, when one is born one might be surrounded by people who are joyful and laughing because there is a new-born baby, however when one dies one will have similar surroundings but this time people might be crying.

As we conclude for the evening, let us take a few moments to contemplate our mind and focus on the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's

mantra. As we focus on the sound of the mantra, we do so one hundred percent on the sound.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed from tape by Judy Mayne
Edit 1 by J Cynthia Karena
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
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