
The Condensed Lam Rim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

5 March 2008

It would be good to spend some time for meditation as usual. As described last week we will sit in an appropriate posture for meditation, which is a relaxed but upright one.

The next important thing is to set one's mental attitude by generating a positive motivation. The best motivation we can develop is one such as: 'The purpose of doing meditation practice is so that I can benefit and help other sentient beings. In order to be of service and benefit to others, I need to first develop my own mind so that it becomes more subdued. That is done through the practice of meditation - first engaging in the practice of meditation to acquire a clear and focused mind and with that I will then be able to achieve many more qualities, especially the tools and techniques to benefit other beings.'

The attitude that is unique to Buddhism is to cultivate a state of mind wishing all sentient beings to have every happiness and to be free from every type of suffering, which respectively encompass great love and great compassion. In Buddhism, love is defined as wishing others to be happy, whereas wishing others to be free from suffering is what we call compassion. These two attitudes that one develops in one's mind encompass the entire essence of the Buddhist teachings. Thus, from the very beginning of our practice, our motivation encompasses the entire essence of the Buddhist teachings, enabling us to acquire a great amount of merit by simply developing that motivation.

The reason why the teachings describe the attitude of developing love and compassion towards all sentient beings as being unique and meritorious is because it is not easy to develop that state of mind. When we think about it, the wish for all living beings to be happy and free from suffering does not come about easily. One cannot develop that non-discriminating state of mind naturally. But when one attains that state of mind after putting in some effort, one can see that it is such a unique and extraordinary state of mind and there is no doubt it brings us great merit.

From a practical perspective, in order to bring happiness for other sentient beings and free them from suffering, we need to go back to the earlier motivation for our meditation practice, which is that: 'I need to engage in the practice of meditation to develop a clear, focused and peaceful mind'. One may wonder what the relevance is of having a focused, clear and peaceful mind for serving and benefiting others. When we look at the practical benefits, we can definitely see that if one has a focused, clear and calm mind, it will naturally bring us joy and happiness, and bring about a calming effect on others.

With such a frame of mind, when we actually engage in helping others, it becomes much more fruitful. We can see that even in our immediate relationships, particularly in a relationship between two partners, when one has a subdued, calm and peaceful mind, it definitely helps the other person in the relationship to feel calmer, more settled and peaceful.

This is also true at a broader level. A person who has a relatively calm, peaceful and happy mind has a positive effect on anyone they associate with. Even from our limited daily experience, we can see the relevance of developing a clear and focused mind in order to really benefit others.

So having a peaceful, subdued mind is most important in serving and benefiting others. While it serves the purpose of benefiting others, it practically benefits oneself as well.

If we look into the reality of our wish to have happiness and not to experience suffering, this aspiration is shared by every single being. We all have that common wish. Everyone also has the wish to have a peaceful mind, which is actually crucial for our wellbeing. All the different kinds of worldly knowledge that we can acquire do not necessarily help to bring about a peaceful mind. But if we were to develop the techniques to attain a peaceful state of mind, our worldly knowledge could actually be directed to benefit us. In other words, if we lack the techniques and tools to have a peaceful mind, our worldly knowledge will only contribute to more turmoil, more confusion and problems within our life. Whereas if we use the tools and techniques to gain a peaceful mind, our worldly knowledge can actually serve to benefit us.

To illustrate further the benefits of having a peaceful mind versus the disadvantages of not having a peaceful mind, we can take the example of the daily life of certain individuals who lack sufficient worldly material conditions, yet have a happy mind. For such individuals who have practised the technique to bring about a peaceful state of mind, while they may lack good external conditions, we can see they have a very happy and joyful outlook. That is because they are practising the tools and techniques that bring about result of a peaceful mind. Even though they seem deprived of worldly conditions and comforts, because they have acquired the inner conditions of a happy and peaceful mind, their life is also joyful and happy.

On the other hand, we can see other individuals who have all the material comforts, but who lack the techniques for bringing about a peaceful mind. Thus even with all their material gains, they may still be unhappy and lack joy in their life. What this shows clearly is that the real condition for having a joyful, happy life is the practice of developing a peaceful mind. Thus the practice of attaining a peaceful mind is really essential: it is the main condition for a joyful and happy life. If we want to have a happy and joyful life, it is essential for us to learn and use the techniques for bringing about a peaceful mind.

Understandably, there may still be doubt in people's mind that it seems absurd one could be happy and joyful without having good material conditions. Aren't they the

real conditions for having a joyful, happy life? That doubt arises because we are conditioned to think in that way. We all have the worldly view that what makes us happy and joyful is material gain; that if one were to lack material comfort and gain, one would lack real joy and happiness.

Those who have such doubts may ask of the teacher: 'What you say may all be very well, but in reality we do need material comfort, don't we, to have happiness?' [Geshe-la chuckles] Those that have that very strong notion may think that the teacher doesn't know what he's talking about, that he is a fool! [Geshe-la laughs] However for those that have such a doubt, to be reasonable here, you must understand that I am not implying in any way that one should deprive oneself of all material gains, particularly in relation to the essentials we all need to survive, such as food and clothing. To get sufficient clothing and food, we need to have money for purchasing them. We all need money in order to have the basic essentials for our survival. I am not suggesting in any way that we should deprive ourselves of that. If I were to imply that, then I would be in the category of being foolish or crazy. Of course that's not what I'm saying. We all do need the basic bare essentials.

What I am saying is that while we do need essentials such as food, clothing and so forth to survive - and, on top of that, other material conditions that make our life more comfortable physically - if we can utilise those external good conditions to bring real happiness and joy to our mind, then we are gaining the best from both worlds. If spiritually one has developed oneself to the point where one can maintain a state of joy and happiness, then our good external conditions can serve not only to bring us more comfort, but to help us maintain a happy life.

What I am emphasising is that what we all want peace, joy and happiness in life. If we have the inner conditions, then our external conditions can serve to bring about more joy and happiness - that's fine because that's what we need. We're all striving to achieve joy and happiness. However, if we lack the inner conditions to have a peaceful mind, then any excess external conditions such as material gain and so forth are not likely to serve the purpose of bringing about a happy life and a peaceful mind, but rather will bring about more trouble, more confusion in one's mind.

Going back to the main point earlier, the main things that we all want are peace of mind, joy and happiness, so if our external conditions contribute to bringing about more trouble, confusion and disturbance in our mind, then rather than benefiting us, those conditions are actually starting to harm us. To be able to utilise our external conditions for serving our real purpose, we need to develop the inner conditions of having real peace of mind. With the inner condition of a peaceful mind, our external conditions will serve to help us to gain more joy and happiness in our life.

Having understood the importance of needing the right tools or techniques for gaining peace of mind, one may then ask, what are these tools? We can describe them in one word - meditation. While there are different techniques within the practice of meditation, as a

summary meditation can be described as the tool for bringing real peace in one's mind, which is followed by real joy and happiness.

At this point, one may then ask further: How does meditation serve as a technique to bring about peace in one's mind? And if one were not to engage in the practice of meditation, how would that contribute to the lack of peace of mind?

First we will explain how the lack of meditation practice serves to bring about a lack of peace in one's mind. I'm not implying that everyone will be in the same situation, however many of you may have had the experience of lapsing in the practise of meditation, and noticing that not being in a meditative frame of mind means that the mind is in a distracted state. A mind that is distracted is not a mind that is in a meditative state. When the mind is in a distracted state, it is distracted usually by either memories of the past or fears about the future. It may be memories of uncomfortable situations from the past, which bring about a feeling of guilt, or a feeling of strong regret or discomfort in one's mind. Such memories cause anxiety in one's mind because of the emotions they stir up. Or we may be distracted by thoughts and ideas of the future. It may be fear of the unknown: what will happen in the future, how will my situation be? This will bring about a certain amount of fear in one's mind, fear of the unknown or fear about the possibility of things going wrong - again, bringing about a lot of anxiety and disturbance in the mind.

In this way, either in relation to the past or the future, the mind is completely distracted, which can lead to mental disturbance; that state of anxiety can lead to depression, feeling unhappy, and so forth. Even in relation to the present, there may be worries because certain things are not going well right now.

In all three situations - worrying about a situation from the past, the future or the present - if we allow the mind to be distracted and completely immersed in those worries and anxieties, it can only contribute to a heavier state of mind and the feeling of being burdened by all of these problems and difficulties. That is when one experiences a depressed state of mind, which is the opposite of a joyful and happy mind. For those in that situation, the reason we feel depressed and overwhelmed is because the mind is completely distracted.

To help to overcome that situation and at least achieve a temporary state of calmness and peace in one's mind, we can use the technique of meditation to withdraw one's mind from all these concerns, and to temporarily put them aside; we do not allow the mind to be influenced by thoughts of the past, present or future. This is done by using our mind to focus intentionally on a chosen object. In that very process of focusing on a neutral or positive object, we are actually distancing our mind from all of these concerns. Thus the immediate experience we have is that the mind begins to settle down and feel much calmer.

The technique that we use here in our meditation practice is to use our breath as a focus point. To get some benefit from our meditation, even if it's just for a few minutes, one must make the determination that for the next few

minutes one will not allow the mind to be influenced by the various distractions or thoughts that arise, whether they are what we conventionally call negative thoughts, or even what we would call good thoughts. For the time being, we determine not to follow any thoughts, good or bad, but just maintain our focus on the breath for the sake of training our mind. We need to completely distance our mind from all thoughts, good or bad, and just place our focus on the meditation object, which is our breath, then try to maintain that focus for as long as comfortably possible. In order to do that we must first make the firm determination, that I will put all my energy in engaging in this practice now. *[Pause for meditation]*

That should be sufficient for now. Geshe-la would like to know if someone has any questions. If anyone has questions you can raise your hand.

Since there seems to be no questions, we will go over a few lines from the text. Although we seem to have not much time left, we will go over a few lines.

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 strains for liberation

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2. Reflection on the causes of suffering – the faults of cyclic existence

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.1. How afflictions or delusions arise

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.1.1. How the delusions or afflictions serve as the primary origin, cause or source

Following from the topic we were covering in the previous sessions, we are at that point in the text that is an explanation of the first of the four noble truths - the truth of suffering. The text is relating how the truth of suffering applies to the various types and degrees of suffering and discomfort within the cycle of existence, which includes this human existence. When we think about that in great detail, it should instil in us an urgent sense of not wishing to experience that suffering for oneself and for others. Particularly in relation to oneself, we should develop a strong yearning to be free from the various types of suffering; from that strong wish, one develops the strong determination to achieve liberation.

This leads to the second noble truth, which is thinking about the causes of suffering. In relation to our wish to remove suffering, the teachings explain that the various types of suffering we experience do not come about spontaneously, without any causes and conditions. All the types of suffering we and others experience come about as a consequence of certain causes and conditions that precede the suffering. In order to explain the causes of the various types of suffering, the text goes into the second noble truth, which is the origination of suffering - the delusions and karma.

If one does not wish to experience the various types of suffering, the teachings explain the causes of suffering and the means of overcoming them. Because if one does not wish to experience the suffering, which is a result, one must first deal with the causes that bring about those various sufferings. Thus, the second noble truth, which deals with the origin of suffering, is explained in detail. The text first explains how, by engaging in the causes of

suffering, one would experience all the various types of suffering in the cycle of existence, which is why the heading here is 'reflection on the process of cyclic existence in terms of its origin'.

From here, the origin of cyclic existence is explained in three parts. The first is 'how the afflictions or delusions arise'. The second is 'how you thereby accumulate karma' and the third is 'how through that process one dies and is born again in the cycle of existence'.

The first - 'how the afflictions or delusions arise' - is subdivided into two. The first of these two is 'how the delusions or afflictions serve as the primary origin, cause or source' and the second is 'how thus then one engages in generating these delusions'.

As the text explains, karma and the afflictions are both necessary causes for the creation of cyclic existence, but the afflictions are primary. Just as without moisture, soil and so forth, a seed will not produce a sprout, so in the absence of afflictions, even though karma is accumulated, one will not experience the result of cyclic existence.

To explain further of how the afflictions or delusions are primary in creating the causes of cyclic existence, further on in the teachings are quotes from other texts stating that, even if one has the previous karma, if the delusions are not present, then that karma will not serve as a condition in itself to accumulate the new karma to be reborn in cyclic existence. What is being explained here is that the delusions serve as the primary cause for us to be reborn in cyclic existence.

To explain that process, within the various types of delusions, the main one, which is explained here, is the grasping to the self. Even when we think about our own experience, we will notice that the initial grasping to the self induces a self-importance in us. Because of this self-interest that we have, we have a very strong grasping or attachment to the self and anything in relation to the self. From that strong self-grasping, one will have attachment towards those who are favourable to oneself and aversion or anger to persons or factors that are not favourable to oneself. Thus the secondary delusions of attachment and anger arise from the initial delusion of grasping to the self. That is how it is said that we accumulate karma - by initially having a strong grasping to the self. Then we engage in many different kinds of activities to acquire things that are favourable to us and to destroy things that are not favourable to us. In that way, we accumulate karma.

More details about the accumulation of karma will be further explained in the text. However, we will just go over briefly here how that works, how the delusions serve as a primary cause, and how accumulating karma serves as secondary causes and conditions.

It is said in the teachings that we may have already accumulated karma in the past - for example, the karma to be reborn as an animal in a future life. Now that karmic imprint is already stored in our mind from the past because we have engaged previously in the causes and conditions, and the karmic imprint to be reborn an animal is already implanted on our mind. However it is said that the factor that activates that karma in our mind

is the delusions. It is the delusions which activate that karmic imprint, which is called a throwing karma - a karma that throws us or propels into a future life to be reborn as an animal. So if one actually gets rid of delusions and doesn't have delusions in one's mind - delusions here meaning the afflictions or the negative states of mind - then because there is no activator in our mind, even if one has accumulated a karma in the past to be reborn as an animal, it will not be sufficient in itself to bring about that result in the next rebirth. In other words, we may have the karma from the past to be reborn in an unfortunate rebirth such as an animal, but because the delusions are eliminated, that karma itself will not be powerful enough to throw us into a future life.

Further analogies are given in the teachings, for example, someone who has entered the paths and reaches the path of seeing and in that very life is determined to attain liberation. While such a being may still have residue of karmic seeds or imprints from previous lifetimes to be reborn in unfortunate rebirths, because they have overcome the delusions from its very root and thus are guaranteed to obtain liberation in that very lifetime, the karmic imprints in their mind cannot be activated and thus cannot serve as a condition for them to be reborn in unfortunate rebirths.

As the text explains, the further reason that afflictions are primary is because even without previously accumulated karma, if afflictions are present, you immediately accumulate new karma and will thereby appropriate aggregates in the future. To back that explanation, the text quotes from another text, Dharmakirti's *Commentary on the Compendium of Valid Cognition*. The quote is 'that karma of one who has transcended craving for existence lacks the potency to project another birth because its cooperating conditions are gone'. Cooperating conditions here refers to the delusions. As it reads here, those who have transcended craving for a future rebirth in cyclic existence, lack the conditions for another rebirth because the delusions are overcome.

In the same text, it mentions that the aggregates will arise again if you have craving. What is being explained here is that if we have the delusion of craving, in relation to the twelve links, it's the link of craving that leads on to grasping, so craving and grasping are the two links that activate the previously accumulated karma to be reborn in cyclic existence. Thus craving, which is a form of strong attachment, serves as the cooperative condition to obtain the contaminated aggregates again in the cyclic existence.

The main point that one can reflect on for one's practice is that what brings about the conditions of suffering is the causes that one may still have, which is called the origin of suffering. The origin of suffering is divided into two main parts: the delusions and karma. And within the delusions and karma, the delusions or afflictions are the primary cause, and the karma serves as secondary conditions for us to experience suffering.

The text leads us into further explanation of the process of understanding the origin of suffering, explaining what the delusions are, and the type of delusions that serve as a primary cause or condition to accumulate karma that

leads us into cyclic existence. What the teaching is doing by presenting what the delusions are, is to help us identify them clearly, which will then serve as a means for us to overcome the delusions. In order to abandon them, we must first recognise what the delusions are.

We will conclude the teaching session for this evening. But before the end of our session, we will again take a few minutes for contemplation. This time in our meditation practice, as we sit in an appropriate posture, we will focus on the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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