
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. For that purpose we sit in a comfortable sitting position. Having adopted a comfortable sitting position it is equally important to have a relaxed mind. When the mind is relaxed and in a clear state one can develop a positive attitude or motivation for the practice. It is important to generate a positive motivation in order for the practice to bring positive results.

The mind is very much connected to the physical body so when the mind is in turmoil it seems to affect the physical body as well. We feel the ill-effects of stress within our physical body. When the mind is in a state of turmoil, that seems to cause the four elements that pervade throughout the body to become unbalanced. When the four elements are affected then that seems to affect the flow of energy in the channels. (There are specific terms for what we call the channels within the body. Sometimes the term 'veins' is used in the Tibetan terminology. At a gross level they are like the veins within the body but on a subtle level, they are actually energy channels or *nadis* in Sanskrit). It seems that when the elements in the body are not in a good balance, the energy does not flow well within the body. When that occurs then the physical health seems to become affected, and as a result we experience different symptoms, such as stress and illness.

Further, when the energies do not flow well within the body, the immune system seems to be affected and our resistance to diseases diminishes. Thus we become very prone to contracting certain types of illnesses and disease. The medical texts from the teachings explain how the immune system is weakened by the energies not flowing well in the body, which is caused by the elements not being in balance in the body. That in turn again causes the mind to feel more troubled and restless. This explains the connection of the physical body with the mind.

If we can understand how the state of mind affects the physical body and vice versa, then we can see how it is essential to have a relaxed, calm mind in order to have good physical health. The practice of meditation is a way to settle down the mind and bring it into tranquillity and calmness.

As we want the best for ourselves, it is in our own interest that we take into consideration the necessities of having a calm, tranquil mind that will contribute to good physical health. When we look into what we desire on a temporary, immediate level we all desire to have a good healthy body and a happy, joyful mind. That is undeniably a goal that we all want to achieve. As it is our natural wish to have that, it is important to constantly remind ourselves of this and think about how to gain true

physical and mental health. We need to think again and again about how that can be achieved.

I often emphasise the great importance of maintaining sound physical and mental health. The reason I do so is because regardless of the background one may come from, whether one is following a spiritual path or considers oneself particularly religious or not, we all equally wish for a happy life, meaningful life. Having a happy, joyful mind and a healthy body definitely contributes to a meaningful, happy life. That is something that we all need in common. So we definitely need to obtain and maintain physical and mental health. Thus I stress this essential point again and again.

Having emphasised how it is essential to have good physical and mental health, the means and techniques to secure physical and mental health, particularly mental health, from a Buddhist point of view, is through the practice of meditation. The practice of meditation is the technique for gaining sound mental health.

The technique for securing mental health and acquiring mental happiness and peace that is presented in the religious context, particularly the Buddhist context, is the practice of meditation. I mentioned earlier that regardless of whether one considers oneself religious or not, we all want good physical and mental health. It is good to acknowledge to oneself that even if one doesn't consider oneself religious, or Buddhist for that matter, it is still in one's own interest to find the proper means to gain physical and mental health.

If there is a technique that we can easily access and use for our own benefit, then by all means we have the right to use it. There are different religious denominations such as Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism and so forth. If there are some particular techniques presented in the Christian faith that are useful and worthwhile to integrate into one's own practice then Buddhists can adopt those techniques and use them for their practice. By all means that is something that one can do and has a right to do. Likewise, for those that follow the Christian faith if there are some techniques that are presented in the Buddha's teachings that seem helpful to integrate into their own practice of their own faith then, by all means, they have the right to do that.

I can vouch for the Buddhist faith that you can definitely use those techniques, regardless of whether you are following another religion or have no religion at all. The Buddha himself said, 'My teachings are for the purpose of benefiting all sentient beings.' He presented the teachings and practices with the intention to benefit anyone who can benefit from them, regardless of who they are or where they are; as he says, 'All sentient beings.' Furthermore, to quote from another sutra the Buddha says, 'Anyone who benefits other sentient beings is similar to benefiting me. Equally anyone who harms any living being is like harming me.' The core essence of his teachings is presented in those words. His intention and those of his followers is the practice of non-violence. When you practise non-violence as a Buddhist, then you are practising the essence, the core of the Buddha's teachings. That is the Buddha's intention.

There is great significance, and a practical reason, to take to the great, kind teacher Buddha Shakyamuni's words at face value. The reason why the Buddha mentions benefiting other sentient beings is equal to benefiting himself and harming other sentient beings is equal to harming himself, is because the Buddha has an unbiased, or impartial, love and compassion indiscriminately towards all sentient beings. There is no sense of discrimination between sentient beings to the Buddha whereby some are friends, some enemies and others strangers. There is no discrimination as such in the Buddha's state of mind. All sentient beings are equally most dear and worthy of love and compassion to the Buddha.

We can use a conventional example of this to get some sense of understanding of what the Buddha meant. We can take the love of a mother for a child. A mother has a genuine, kind, compassionate and loving attitude towards her children. If someone were to benefit her children she would naturally feel joy and happy because someone is helping her children. It is as if the mother has benefited. This is because she has a very strong love for her children. Similarly, if anyone were to harm the children, she would feel the pain and hurt as well. This is again because of her unconditional love for the children. We can take that contemporary example to begin to understand how, for the Buddha, helping or harming sentient beings is equal to benefiting or harming him. It is because he has indiscriminate love and compassion for all sentient beings.

Coming back to the main point, the technique the Buddha presents in his teachings for bringing about a settled, calm, and tranquil mind is meditation. When the mind is calm and tranquil it will contribute to well-being within our physical body. One should investigate for oneself, and gauge from one's own experience whether this is true or not. It is only by actually engaging in the practice that one can get some experience of it. Those who have attempted to do some practice of meditation will have noticed that when we engage in the practice of meditation, then for whatever period of time that we manage, during that time the mind does settle down and become calmer and more tranquil. Even physically we feel quite rested and energised as well. The reason that we feel that positive effect within our mind and body is because the technique of meditation actually works.

Now to explain a bit about how it works. First of all how do we understand a mind that is in turmoil, that is troubled, that is full of anxiety and worries? How does that occur? The teachings explain that this occurs because the mind is constantly distracted by worldly objects. By their very nature worldly objects cause delusions to arise in the mind and that causes turmoil to arise in the mind because the mind gets distracted. Because we, as ordinary beings, are constantly pre-occupied with worldly concerns, the mind is in a constant flux of distractions.

If we were to pay attention to how our mind works we would acknowledge to ourselves that our mind is constantly busy. And busy with what? Busy with worldly concerns, which are described in the teachings as distractions. That is the cause for the mind being in

turmoil, or troubled and other unpleasant situations that we can identify with, such as anxiety, worries, stress, depression and so forth. In order to reverse that situation within our mental state we need to reverse the whole way in which the mind works at present. That will bring the mind into a settled, not distracted, state. If the distractions are the cause of a troubled mind then we need to overcome the distractions.

The practice of meditation is a technique of withdrawing the mind from the distractions. The meditation technique is to focus on a single object, and by focusing on a particular chosen object, the mind naturally withdraws from all the distractions. It naturally becomes more settled. The result of the mind becoming settled and focused is that it becomes clearer, more peaceful and calm.

Having explained the technique of the practice of meditation and how it works we can now spend some minutes in the actual practice of meditation. The object that we use for our meditation here is our own breath. This is a neutral object. When we mention focusing on the breath, we refer to the natural process of inhalation and exhalation of our breath. We make a mental commitment not to allow our mind to be distracted by other thoughts, other ideas and so forth, but rather bringing our full focus and complete attention to our breath. For the next few minutes we commit to ourselves, 'I will be focused only on the breath, 100% focused on the breath.' For the next few minutes we will just observe our natural breathing, the breath coming in and going out. In that way we will spend a few minutes. (*Pause for meditation.*)

If one were to continue to practice meditation, as we have attempted now for a short time, it would be beneficial for oneself. The results of the practice of meditation basically come from familiarity with the practice. Familiarity with the practice means familiarising oneself with the internal object. As described in previous sessions the practice of focusing on the object becomes focusing on an internalised object. The measure of one's progress when one focuses on that internalised object is seen when one notices that one's pre-occupation with external objects begins to reduce. The reduction of one's pre-occupation with external objects, which is a distraction, comes about only through familiarity with focusing on an internal object. The more familiar we become with the internal object, the easier it becomes to maintain our focus on the internal object, thus naturally we will spend less time focusing on external objects.

The reason we are distracted so easily now is because of our familiarisation with external objects. In our ordinary state we are constantly pre-occupied with external, worldly objects. When we refer to external objects we are referring to the objects of distraction, objects that cause delusions to arise in the mind. That is what we are normally familiarised with. To reverse that situation we have to familiarise ourselves with an internal object. This evening we have used our meditation to focus on the breath, which is a neutral object. There are many virtuous internal objects as well. As we become more and more familiar with focusing on virtuous internal objects and attain stability in our focus, we will notice that there is a

reduction in our pre-occupation with external objects. For example, in our current situation when we see an external object of attachment, our mind naturally and spontaneously, becomes pre-occupied with that object and attachment arises in the mind. We give our 100% focus to that object, thus attachment seems to naturally arise in our mind. Thus we get the ill-effects of attachment arising in the mind.

It is similar when we meet with an external object of anger. In our normal, worldly state when we meet with an object of anger we give 100% focus to that external object, which is the object of anger. Thus, by giving 100% focus to the object of anger, we naturally experience anger as a consequence. Anger seems to arise spontaneously in our mind. The intensity of attachment or anger arising in the mind is in relation to how much focus of attention and pre-occupation we allow ourselves to give to the object.

This situation is reversed through the practice of meditation. When we become more familiar with the internal object and give more attention and focus to the internal object we will naturally reverse that situation of giving 100% focus to the external objects of attachment or anger. When we don't give as much focus to objects of attachment or anger, then that attachment or anger reduces. Thus the way to measure the progress of one's meditation practice lies within oneself. One does not need to ask someone else about one's progress. Likewise someone else does not need to tell us about our progress if we know how to measure the progress ourselves. Currently when we see an attractive object we suddenly become excited about it and give it our full attention and focus. Attachment arises and we want to possess that object and interact and get benefit from that object of attachment. Through the practice of meditation with the right techniques one begins to notice that when you now see the same object that previously caused strong attachment to arise in one's mind earlier, now the desire does not rise as strongly. At best it does not arise at all.

Of course that does not happen right away. Initially one sees the progress of one's mind not being as preoccupied with that object of attachment as in the past. When one begins to notice that happening, it is a clear sign of the progress of one's meditation. It is similar with an object of anger. Where earlier one had the tendency to become immediately aggravated and angry by seeing or coming into contact with that object, through one's practice of meditation one begins to notice that we do not experience as intense anger as we used to previously, and at best, anger does not arise at all. That would be a clear sign of the progress of one's meditation.

This is how we measure progress ourselves. It is within our own capacity to measure the progress. This analysis is a means to judge whether the practice of meditation has been successful or not, whether one has used the right technique or not. It does not take someone else to tell us whether we have become good meditators. Externally, others might judge our practice of meditation by whether we are able to sit rigidly for a long time. That doesn't necessarily represent the progress of the practice of

meditation. Being able to sit rigidly for a long time is not a measure; internal assessment is the right way.

When we have been using the right techniques for our practice of meditation with the right attitudes then, as a natural consequence, we will experience a tranquil, calm, peaceful mind. That will then bring about positive consequences for one's physical health as well. Isn't that a good thing to achieve for oneself? Leaving aside for a while what it can bring for future lives, even in our immediate existence right now we can see that there's a great benefit. We will benefit from that practice of achieving a calm, tranquil mind and a good sound, healthy body. That is achieved only when we engage in the right techniques of the practice. With a constant, diligent practice, with the right attitude of seeing that the progress comes slowly and gradually, we can achieve this.

If we were not to engage in this practice and we just leave our distracted state of mind as it is and don't do anything about it, it is not likely for the disturbance to naturally just go away. A distracted state of mind is a state of mind that, when you see or come into contact with an attractive object, the mind becomes 100% focused and pre-occupied with that object of attachment. Likewise, when one comes into contact with an unattractive object the mind becomes 100% focused on that and pre-occupied with the unattractive object and thus anger arises in the mind. If the arising of attachment and anger in one's mind were actually of some benefit for oneself then perhaps it's worthwhile just leaving it as it is. We wouldn't have to do anything about it. However when one really, seriously analyses the affects of attachment and anger arising in one's mind, one would come to notice quite soon that the arising of attachment and anger in one's mind is not to one's benefit. It is the cause for one's turmoil and all the troubles in one's mind.

Take attachment for example. Just relating to our own experience and that of others, what happens when we meet an object of attachment? You know how we put so much time and energy in trying to obtain an object or in pleasing, for example, a person we are attracted to, just so we can get some benefit from it. Trying to please someone seems to become endless and we only get disappointed, but then we try to please them again and again. We try to gain the approval of the person or obtain any other object of attachment. We do this in so many different ways and keep getting entangled more and more. The more we are obsessed with the object of attachment, the more we get entangled with that situation of trying to please it or possess it, but then we end up getting disappointed. In that way we constantly seem to go around in circles, a vicious cycle as it's called in English.

When we feel disappointed with the object of our attachment then anger arises. So between the emotions of anger and attachment, the vicious cycle of experiencing elated when we gain something but angry when are disappointed continues. The realisation of this situation does not just come about naturally. It takes some effort and time, by really looking carefully into the situation

and analyse how attachment works then one will see the disadvantages of this negative emotion.

Likewise with anger. How does anger occur in one's mind? When anger occurs what happens to one's mind? We have to use our scrutiny to look into and sincerely analyse our behaviour before one can notice the ill-effects or disadvantages of anger. When we begin to really notice and accept that attachment and anger have no real benefit to one, then a sincere wish to engage in the technique of getting rid of anger and attachment will come about naturally. This is how one can maintain the interest in the practice of meditation within oneself.

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

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.1.2. Identifying the afflictions

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.1.2.1. In identifying the afflictions

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.1.2.1.1 Desirous attachment

In the text we have come to stage of actually identifying some of the delusions that are described in the teachings. The ten delusions described in the teachings are divided into five that are views and five that are non-views. Within the five that are non-views we covered the first last week. This is attachment or desire and we identified what desire or attachment is. We also looked at the disadvantages of attachment and desire.

Now we have come to the point to where we should be referring to the particular practices to overcome attachment. These are meditation techniques that serve as antidotes in overcoming attachment. We will go further into this in later sessions. The particular meditation technique that serves as an antidote to overcome attachment is said to be meditating on the faults of the object. Attachment is an exaggeration of the qualities of the object. Seeing the faults of the object reduces the attachment. That will be explained in more detail later on.

We have previously talked about the ill-effects or disadvantages of attachment in detail. People naturally come up with doubts or questions such as, 'If desire and attachment is really harmful to oneself, does that mean that one has to shun or refrain from all attachments, and have no desires at all?' That question arises because there is obviously a difficulty in one's mind in accepting the fact that one has to overcome or avoid all objects of desire.

In relation to that doubt about whether one has to avoid all objects of desire, I would refer to one young lady who asked me about that, and it was obviously a concern for her. The person to whom I am referring, like everyone else, finds the idea that 'one has to overcome or abandon all desire' difficult because we are so used to thinking that the object of desire is an object which gives us pleasure and happiness. We identify fleeting pleasure with happiness and really believe that the object of desire does give us some happiness. As long as we have that strong notion and tendency to think in that way, it will be

hard for us to accept the fact that we have to overcome and abandon desire completely.

Referring back to the young lady who asked me that question, and knowing that she was still young and quite new to the whole concept, the answer that I gave to her was, 'Well, it might be worthwhile to think that the real problems in my life, the real big problems in my life, come from attachment. Excessive attachment to objects, which you can notice for yourself give you a problem, is something that you can try to avoid. But maybe small attachments and desires in relation to small objects might be okay for you.'

That served as an appropriate answer for her in relation to her understanding and mental capacity at that time. Later on, as she continued to engage in the practice of meditation and understood more of the Buddha's teachings, she understood what I was really explaining. She came to understand the point I was making from her own experience by studying the teachings further. She understood that desire and attachment to any object, whether it is a big or small, is something that causes one problems, difficulties and brings dissatisfaction to one's mind. She came to that understanding herself, later on, naturally, through her own practice and study. However even when she gained further understanding herself, she was still grateful knowing that I had given a wise and appropriate answer at that time when she needed it.

Even though it is not the case that small objects of desire or attachment are not to be abandoned, the instruction became a personal instruction for her situation and her mental state at that time. It served its purpose at that time for her.

Before concluding for the evening, let us again take a few minutes for contemplation, or meditation. In this instance we use as the focus the Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. We focus on the sound of the mantra and try to maintain our focus on that.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed from tape by Peter Boothby
Edit 1 by John Burch
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
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