
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 relaxed, upright position. Just as we find a comfortable physical position for ourselves to engage in the practice of meditation, it is important to pay attention to our mindset. If we can adopt the right mindset along with an appropriate physical posture we can derive some benefit from the practice of meditation. Keeping that in mind, it is then worthwhile to pay attention to the correct mindset. Even when we are physically relaxed, we might notice that our mind is not really relaxed. It is good then to check into what element is causing the mind to be in a restless state.

When we notice that our mind is a little bit agitated and not very restful, we must reflect on the main purpose of meditation. The purpose of meditation is not just to temporarily relax the body and mind, but rather to develop a clear and focussed mind, which will help to bring about a joyful and peaceful mind. Thus it is important that we remind ourselves of the ultimate purpose.

Most importantly, we must make sure that the effort we put into our meditation practice actually becomes a Dharma practice. The measure we use to determine whether our practice is an actual Dharma practice or not is this: if our practice serves as an antidote to overcome afflictions or negative emotions in our mind then we can feel assured that it is a Dharma practice. If our practice, whatever we are doing, does not serve as a means to overcome the afflictions or negative emotions in our mind then it does not serve the purpose of being a real Dharma practice. Just to feel temporarily relaxed, may not necessarily mean that we are doing an authentic Dharma practice.

As a result of our practice not being an authentic Dharma practice, one finds that no matter how much effort one's put in, there is no real improvement. There is no real transformation in the mind. If we are not engaging in a real Dharma practice, then our mind will not become subdued or transformed as a result of the practice.

If a real Dharma practice is a practice to subdue the mind, one may ask, 'How does one attempt to subdue the mind? How is that done?' If we can relate to the statements in the teachings that 'a subdued mind is a peaceful mind; an unsubdued mind is an agitated mind', then we can reflect upon what that really means and how to apply it.

In order to understand what a subdued mind is, one may first look into the opposite of a subdued mind, an unsubdued mind. What is an unsubdued mind? First of all, an unsubdued mind occurs when we are under the domain of our mind which is influenced by the delusions; the mind in that state is in an unsubdued mind.

To reverse being under the sway or control of the deluded mind, one needs to take control of the mind and make sure that the mind is not under the influence of the delusions. In

this particular case it means to temporarily distance oneself from the delusions and keep our mind centred and focussed onto a positive or neutral object. That will bring about a temporary, subduing affect on the mind.

An unsubdued mind is constantly under the influence of delusions such as attachment, anger, pride or jealousy. When the mind is completely dominated by either of these afflictions or delusions, then, to that extent the mind becomes restless. For example, when attachment dominates the mind it seems that we are completely under the influence of that negative state of mind. We become completely preoccupied with attachment. When strong anger arises in the mind, they say it is as if one is burning with anger. It is as if one is burning internally. That effect seems to happen when anger is very strong and prevalent in our mind and we are completely under the influence or dominance of that negative state of mind of anger.

When one experiences the ill effects of the delusions and identifies the state of one's mind being under the complete influence or dominance of a negative state of mind such as anger, then, by the virtue of having understood that, it will enable us to understand others when they are agitated and disturbed. Particularly with delusions such as anger, where the mind is disturbed and agitated, if one has reflected and investigated within oneself and understood that state of mind then one has more control over oneself and can understand that others are also under the domain or influence of the delusions. Thus, other's agitation and disturbed state of mind will not affect oneself. It may still affect us to a certain extent when our partner or friend is agitated but it will not really disturb our peace of our mind and we will not take it personally because we understand what they are going through. So, to that extent, we also gain the benefit of understanding other's situations.

When we engage in practising meditation in a proper manner, we develop mindfulness and awareness within oneself and through that we are actually cultivating many different understandings. It becomes a real way of practising as we practise meditation. We also achieve many other things on the side such as patience. When we practise meditation well we are less affected by others and we are able to be patient with them. We cultivate patience.

When we assess the benefits of the practice of meditation we can see that there are actually many benefits. Furthermore, when done properly - one's practice of meditation will also enhance kindness, love and compassion within one's mind. Even though one may not see the direct influence or effect of cultivating love and compassion through the practice of meditation or awareness, one can see that, indirectly, it does contribute to developing kindness, love and compassion in our mind.

Coming back to the main point, the positive effect or result of the practice of meditation is that it enables us to subdue our mind. Meditation is practised to enable us to subdue our own mind and we can see the disadvantages of an unsubdued mind. In fact we can posit that every problem that we experience now is because of having an unsubdued mind. This means our mind is not under our control for being in a positive frame; instead it is under the influence of the delusions. As long as our mind is under the influence of the delusions, it is unsubdued.

We can see through our own limited experience, that for as long as our mind is swayed by the different afflictions, the different negative emotions that arise, we become

completely immersed in these delusions. At this stage it seems quite natural for us to be easily influenced by the delusions and we also remain in that state for a long time. For those of us who are not familiar with the practice, it is very hard to focus our mind and not allow it to be influenced by the delusions. Even if we do attempt this, it doesn't remain for long. This is because of the familiarity that we have with the distractions and delusions. We have to change that and instead maintain familiarity with a subdued mind.

When we analyse and investigate in this way we begin to understand the teachings where they say, 'One's happiness or suffering is dependent on one's own mind'. One can begin to understand that statement. One can also begin to understand the statement 'being virtuous or non- virtuous is dependent on the mind'.

Having related the purpose, the technique and the benefits of the practice of meditation, we can now feel encouraged to actually engage in the practice of meditation in a proper manner. In order to engage in the practice of meditation in a proper way - for whatever duration we spend - it is important that we try to make sure that our practice is a unique practice, a real practice of meditation. In order to ensure that our practice becomes a real practice of meditation, it is important that during that time that we decide to practise meditation, we make every attempt to distance our mind from distractions.

The distractions are things that, as soon as one thinks about them, bring some degree of excitement or agitation into the mind. They may be objects or thoughts. As soon as we remember certain objects we may notice that this brings certain emotions to our mind that relate to the delusions of either aversion or attachment. As soon as the memory or thought of that object arises in the mind our mind becomes distracted. Then we will have the ill effect of the delusion arising in the mind and will not be able to focus on the object that we are meant to focus on in the practice of meditation. Our practice of meditation then will not become an authentic practice of meditation because the mind is still occupied with the object of distractions. The mind is still preoccupied with objects that are distractions. Even though we may seemingly be focused, in fact we are not focussed at all.

To train our mind through a real practice of meditation, it is important that we distance ourselves completely from objects of distraction. That means - in lay terms - temporarily forgetting about everything except the object that you are meant to focus on. It doesn't matter if it is a pleasant object or an unpleasant object. Even objects that may seemingly be objects that instil good, positive thoughts; for the purpose to maintain one's focus in meditation, you must temporarily leave them aside.

To pursue a unique practice of meditation and develop a real sense of focus and an attentive mind, we need to temporarily forget all other objects and pay no attention to them. Whether it is good or bad it doesn't matter. Just leave them aside for the time being and place our concern/attention on merely focusing - a hundred percent focus - on the chosen focal object. Here we choose the breath as an object to focus on during meditation. When we spend a few minutes in this practice of being entirely focussed on the breath itself, we are training our mind in a unique and proper practice of meditation. That is how we train our mind. So, for the next few minutes we will just focus on our breath; the natural

inflow and outflow of our breath and maintain our focus 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 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. Identifying the afflictions

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.1.2. The stages in which delusions arise

Last session we started looking at the causes of the afflictions after having described the afflictions earlier. We come to the next category in the explanation of the causes of the afflictions; that which causes afflictions to arise within ourselves. We have already covered the explanations of the first cause, which is the bases, and the second, which is the objects. We now come to the third cause for the afflictions or delusions to arise, which is referred to as social context. Social context refers to being under the influence of bad or negative friends, rather than being in the company of virtuous friends and noble beings. Negative friends means people who influence us to act negatively.

The third point of the causes, which is the social context, is actually quite a difficult one to put into practice at our level: it involves abandoning non-virtuous friends or negative friends who we may consider as being close friends of ours. Bad or negative friends are defined as being companions who contribute to the delusions arising in the mind. The delusions may be attachment, anger, pride, and jealousy. All of these negative emotions are defined as afflictions or the delusions. Companions who contribute to the delusions arising, rather than subsiding, are referred to as negative friends.

How do we avoid a negative social context? A great master has mentioned that it is very true that if one were to be in a social context where we are in the midst of virtuous friends, noble beings, then, by the virtue of being with a noble being and a virtuous person one will adopt the qualities of the virtuous person and all one's activities can be influenced to be a virtuous activity. Whereas if we were in the midst of negative friends who are preoccupied in increasing the delusions in the mind then, naturally, one would be influenced by that and be inclined to adopt their behaviour and engage in negative activity. While that is actually the case and is true, in reality it is beyond our capacity and control for us to try to find a social context where we completely avoid negative friends.

It would mean trying to find a friend or a companion who does not have any anger, who does not have any attachment and who does not have any jealousy, pride or competitive feelings. To find such a friend or companion, whether it is for a man to find such a woman or for a woman to find such a man or to find any companions who do not exhibit any of those delusions is very rare, if not impossible. What this means is that, on a practical level, we need to be mindful and generate a heightened awareness about those we associate with. Whatever social context we are in, we need to be diligent and mindful from one's own side regardless of the other.

In relation to actual companionship, I have mentioned many times previously and I stress regularly that it is important that one tries to see the qualities in the other, rather than

focusing on the negative side. See the qualities in the other person and try to adopt and be influenced by their positive side. Each person, in fact every ordinary being, will have a positive and negative side to them. Just as they would have a negative side and delusions, they also have a positive side. If we focus on the negative side of someone, such as their anger, then every time we think about them we relate to the anger in their mind and feel agitated. We are thus directly influenced to become agitated ourselves. We would be under the influence of anger by just merely thinking about the other's anger. That is how the other's negative influence leads us to also be negative.

Whenever we relate to another person we should think about their qualities and try to adopt them. When we are together with them we should be mindful of their delusions and focus on their positive side. If we maintain a companionship or a relationship with others with that sort of attitude in our mind then if, after a number of years you were to be separated, then when that separation takes place one would be left with the benefit of their qualities. One would be thinking about their qualities and one would have benefited oneself by relating to their qualities. Even after the relationship breaks down one would be left with a good thought, a good feeling. In that way there is also a practical benefit.

One must understand a very important point here: When the teaching suggests that we try to avoid the social context of negative friends it does not, by any means, mean that one must neglect negative friends or people who are of bad influence, and not to feel compassion or love for them. That is not what is meant. In fact people who are influenced by negatives, delusions and so forth are beings to whom we must extend even more compassion and love towards.

One must not misinterpret and misunderstand the teachings to mean that one must shun, neglect or dishonour people with bad intentions or negative states of mind. What the teaching means is that if one recognises a particular kind of negative state of mind or delusion in others, one must try not to be influenced or affected by that. That is the main point of the teaching. It does not mean completely shunning them and not feeling compassion for them. By understanding this, one would be able to maintain one's composure and not be influenced in a negative way.

If this teaching were to be misinterpreted in this way then a doubt will naturally arise, particularly for someone who is intelligent and thinks about the teachings. The Buddhist teachings emphasise very strongly that one should have love and compassion for all living beings. While on the one hand love and compassion towards all living beings has been emphasised very strongly, how can the teachings say then that one must abandon negative friends. That sort of doubt and question will naturally arise in the mind and it is a valid thought. The main point is that when one understands the teaching, one comes to realise that to abandon or shun negative friends, does not mean to abandon the person themselves, but rather to shun and not be influenced by the negative state of mind within them.

There is actually quite an extensive explanation of this point in the teachings along with many stories about how when one is under the influence of negative, non-virtuous friends one engages in a lot of non-virtue. There are many stories. Leaving the stories aside for the time being because of our time constraint, the main point to be understood from this teaching is that because of our state or situation right now

we are very easily influenced by negativity and it is very hard and difficult to be influenced by the positive virtues. Thus we are in a state where we need to be mindful of the social context that we are in. That is the main point of the teachings.

This point is, in fact, very true. It is said that it is very easy for someone who is normally quite moral and nice to be influenced in a negative way by negative friends and, sooner or later, be completely like them and act in unethical ways. Whereas it will be much more difficult and take much more time for a person who is inclined to engage in negative deeds and misbehaviours to be influenced by someone who has good ethical behaviour.

Thus it is quite important for us, at our level, to be mindful of social context. For example, when we are with others who are talking about politics or other kinds of things that cause the delusions such as anger, attachment or jealousy to arise, when we are in that sort of social context, we would have noticed that our own state of mind is easily influenced by those delusions, and those negative states of mind also arise in us as well.

We can also take the example of children who are studying. As parents, we advise children to try not to mingle with children who are misbehaving, because we know that if our child is naturally inclined to be quite diligent in their studies, they would, if they were to mingle and mix with naughty kids for too long, also adopt those misbehaviours. We can see that this is because children are very easily influenced by their immediate environment. When it comes to dealing with delusions it is exactly the same for us, who are beginners in the practice of Dharma. If those of us who are inclined to engage in the practice of Dharma try to have a virtuous frame of mind, but allow ourselves to be unmindful in social contexts and are not diligent, we would be easily influenced by the delusions and thus engage in non-virtuous deeds and thoughts. That is the main point that we need to remember from this advice.

Leaving aside the spiritual context of these teachings, we can see that the advice given in the teachings is actually very much related to our mundane existence in the world. It gives us very good advice on how to interact and relate in the outside world. On reflection, it seems that parents who are spiritually inclined seem to have a unique way of bringing up their children as opposed to parents who don't have any sort of religious values. There definitely seems to be a difference in how they are bringing up their children.

We don't have much time left. Maybe there are one or two questions.

Geshe-la, with great respect, I thought it was rather hazardous to speculate on the spiritual faith or attainment of another person. Shantideva was thought at one time to be rather lazy and ignorant. When the time came he spoke with great clarity and wisdom. Is it wise to embark on an exercise of speculating on another person's spiritual attainment?

I am in total agreement with that, as are the teachings. One part of the teachings actually very explicitly emphasises that one cannot gauge the qualities of others merely by seeing their appearance. One cannot judge or see their qualities. There is a commonly used Tibetan saying that goes 'The pattern of stripes on a tiger is on the outside, whilst a person's patterns are on the inside'; patterns here are analogous to qualities. The specific statement from the text *Valid Cognition* is that 'there can be no certainty with appearance', thus one cannot rely upon mere appearance.

There are extensive explanations in the commentaries about how one cannot merely rely on appearances.

The great Tibetan master Gyalstep Rinpoche composed a commentary on the above-mentioned text, and in the commentary he explains the meaning of the quote to be that because one cannot rely on one's own perceptions, one cannot be sure who might actually be a holy or noble being. It could be anyone.

He uses an analogy to illustrate the danger of criticising others because they could very well be holy beings. The analogy is of a pit that is dug and filled with red embers and covered with earth and leaves. From the surface it may appear as though it is level ground and there would be no danger to walk over it. But if you were to walk over that camouflaged pit, you would certainly fall in and be burnt by the embers at the bottom of the pit. Likewise someone may appear to be very ordinary or even obnoxious but they may in fact be a holy or noble being in disguise, and criticising them with negative, angry thoughts would be like falling into a fire pit.

The great master Shantideva, who you have mentioned, is said to have practised humility to the extent of even bowing down to bugs and insects. He had that much humility in showing that even with bugs and insects you cannot be sure whether they may be incredible beings in disguise. The main point is that as we definitely cannot rely upon our ordinary perceptions, it is thus safest to respect everyone, in fact all living beings. That is why all Buddhist traditions emphasise that respect and modesty are the qualities that most need to be developed. In the Tibetan tantric teachings it says that you must see and treat all others as enlightened beings. That is the safest measure to take.

How do we ordinary beings actually gauge others? With those we actually live with for a long time and with those we associate with for many years on end, we can have a close estimate (*laughter*). But in relation to other people like strangers, there is no way of telling what level they may be at just by merely looking at someone. We cannot judge them at all merely by their appearance.

I can give the personal story of a couple I have known for a number of years. The lady confided in me that there are times she feels her partner could be a Buddha because he is really compassionate and really kind. So, there are times when she actually feels that he might already be enlightened. Yet at other times, when he exhibits his wrath and anger, she feels, 'Oh, I am not sure that enlightened beings would have that much anger' (*laughter*).

There is another quote from the teachings which say that 'you can estimate others feelings by their external gestures'. If you are familiar with someone and have associated with them for a long time you would know that their facial expressions change when they have certain emotions. We can know that from long association and knowing them quite well. We can make quite a good guess that they are angry when they have certain facial expressions. One can also estimate the levels of attainment and qualities of others by some external gestures..

The analogies that are used in the teachings are what we call syllogisms. For example, even though one may not see a fire on a hill, if one detects smoke on the hill, one can safely reason that there has to be fire on the hill as well, for there can not be smoke without fire. Another syllogism is that even though one may not see water in a distance, if one sees water birds hovering in the distance that is a good reason

that there is actually water in the distance too. Likewise, even though we may not actually see the qualities of noble beings, we can estimate that someone has unique inner qualities when there are certain external features such as weeping uncontrollably with faith when thinking of the Guru, or uncontrollably shedding tears with compassion when thinking of the suffering of sentient beings. These external gestures and others, like hairs standing on end with the emotion of love and compassion, can be an external sign to indicate that certain beings actually have the qualities of love and compassion within their mind. All these explanations are given in *Valid Cognition*. Your question, reminded me of these explanations in the teachings, so thanks for that!!

Before we conclude for the session this evening, we can again spend a few moments in meditation. This time as the mantra of Buddha Shakyamuni is recited we try to maintain our focus on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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