
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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Wouldn't it be good to start with some meditation? So let us sit in a comfortable and upright position. As we relax physically, it would be worthwhile to relax the mind as well in attempt to bring about a happy state of mind. As we may have experienced in life, even if we are relaxed physically our mind may not completely be content or happy. We may feel that something is lacking internally, and this is what continually troubles us in life.

Do you sometimes wonder, 'Even though I wish for a happy state of mind, why is it so difficult to achieve that? Why doesn't a happy mind come about naturally?'

If we do wonder why we don't feel content and really happy; there may be various different reasons, but I feel that it really comes down to two main points which lead to unrest and unhappiness in the mind: not being able to fulfil our desires is one level, but even when we do get some satisfaction from desires, then not feeling content with that. These seem to be the two main causes of unhappiness in the mind. We feel unhappy and troubled either because we can't fulfil our desires, or we are never satisfied with what we have.

The first point, which is having many desires but not being able to fulfil them, seems true when we look into our situation of never ending needs. Then we feel disappointed and full of angst.

The second point is a lack of contentment, where we may have fulfilled an initial desire then we realise that the outcome was not as satisfactory as we expected it to be. Or when the desire is fulfilled, we may feel unsatisfied and start striving for more. Not being able to obtain what one desires can be considered 'unfortunate'. For example, people who lack basic survival means would be in the category of not having the capacity to fulfil their desires.

There could be many reasons why one's desires are not fulfilled. Either it could be lacking the means to fulfil them, or it could also sometimes be out of sheer laziness. Even though people might have the means and the ability to obtain their desires, but out of laziness some of them may not seek to do so. This would be considered, even from a worldly perspective, as an unfortunate state. However the suffering or unhappiness that arises from discontentment can be experienced even by those who are very well-off in society.

So when we look into the situation of our predicament—and the world's predicament—it seems that all our busyness and all our activities are designed to either fulfil our basic desires, or feel more content with the desires that we have fulfilled. If we don't feel content, then we busy ourselves with trying to achieve more so that we

may be content. Chasing after desire and contentment seems to make all of us constantly busy. We are always doing something to fulfil our desires and make ourselves content.

I personally feel that some insight into this reality can really help us, particularly for those of us who feel that we don't have as much as others, and that compared to others we are materially behind. But when we think about the reality of those who seem to be better off, we start to realise that even though they may seem to have more materially, inwardly there is not much difference between them and us.

By reflecting upon this reality, we can then strive to pursue the authentic means for achieving real happiness in our mind. This pursuit is infallible and it will really contribute to feeling a sense of joy and happiness in our mind. Wouldn't that be really worthwhile and beneficial for us?

We all need a certain level of financial security, so we try to fulfil our desires. However, when we begin to feel discouraged or miserable because we don't seem to be able to fulfil our aims, it is good to reflect upon the reality that a desired goal doesn't just come about naturally without causes and conditions. Whatever desirable situation we seek, it depends on many causes and conditions. There have to be many factors in place in order for our desires to be fulfilled. Reflecting on that will help us to understand why we may not be able to achieve a desired goal.

Reflecting on the many causes and conditions that are necessary to achieve our desired state will help us to accept the reality of not being able to achieve it right now. We have to accept the reality of the level that we are at now. If we think in this way, we will not get too depressed. I have witnessed certain people who are feeling so discouraged and feeling hopeless and depressed that they just crouch in a corner with their whole body tight and rigid.

In reality, achieving a desirable situation does not come about naturally. For example, thinking about or speaking aloud our wishes, saying 'I wish to have such-and-such a situation' will not help it to materialise. Likewise, if we do not desire an unpleasant situation, then just wishing or saying 'I don't want that undesirable situation' does not in itself prevent that situation. Causes and conditions always include two facets: things that oppose achieving a desired situation, and things that are conducive. Of the opposing and the conducive, beneficial factors, we may lack one and have more of the other. And that is what causes us not to obtain our desired situation.

If we only experienced the beneficial factors, then it would be relatively easy to achieve our goals. If everything was conducive to achieving those goals then there would be nothing to stop us from reaching them. However the reality is that there are opposing factors. When opposing factors occur, they can hinder us, mainly by discouraging us, especially when our mind cannot endure those opposing factors. When an opposing factor occurs, then we may immediately see it as a block and think 'Oh, I can't go on further' and we feel overwhelmed and not able to endure it. Or we may feel impatient. So

that is how opposing factors become an obstacle. But if we are determined to go ahead and keep persevering regardless of the opposing factors, if we can embrace them and not allow them to become an obstacle, then it is possible for us to break through those opposing factors and achieve our goal. It is definitely possible.

As one of the great Kadampa masters has mentioned, 'for those who wish to achieve the purpose of Dharma, patience is most essential'.

The perseverance we need to obtain our goals is based on developing a certain level of endurance to withstand any difficulties that are bound to occur. If we allow those opposing factors to overwhelm us, then as soon as a difficulty arises we think 'Oh, I can't go further, this is too much to handle.' If we give up and seek a new goal, then other opposing factors will arise in our path, then we might give up again and seek yet another goal. Because of our lack of endurance and determination, we may constantly give up whatever we begin and never achieve our desired goal. The main point I am making is that if our life is a constant pursuit of desires and we never develop a sense of contentment, then our minds will constantly be busy with worldly concerns.

The advice I give to people, especially young people, about fulfilling their needs in life is to pay attention in their studies. This is particularly true when they are young—a teenager of 15 or 16—when their level of intelligence has reached a point where they can understand things and they can put their mind to study. It is good if they can keep their mind focused on their studies. Of course the best would be 100% focused, but if not then 90% or 80%, as they also fill their life with friends and going out. Even though they need to have friends and socialise with them, if they can persevere and dedicate most of their time to study in the coming few years, then they can really establish a sound basis for their future life. When people complete their studies to the best of their abilities, then they will be equipped with the right tools. If we don't use the skills that we learned through our studies, then of course that is another matter. But if we actually use those skills, then we are equipped with the right tools to provide ourselves with a good livelihood, and we can take care of ourselves in this life. That's what I emphasise and stress for young people. Some youngsters who have since become adults have actually benefited from that advice and have achieved good results.

The two main opposing factors in attaining happiness are being preoccupied with fulfilling our desires, and not being content with what we have. These are essential points to reflect upon. If we try to think about the situation, then we would get an insight into the reality that these two factors really do lead to mental unrest and unhappiness. Recognising what disturbs our mind and what brings it unhappiness is really worthwhile.

The factors that oppose our happiness can further be condensed into the distractions. All the disturbing thoughts that preoccupy our mind are the distractions. So, if we were to withdraw ourselves from those distractions and settle our mind upon an object such as our breath, then we can definitely feel a great relief and a

sense of calmness in our mind. Meditating like this for even a few minutes can bring about a state of mental tranquillity.

By withdrawing from all our distractions, even for five minutes, this experience of relative calmness and tranquillity in our mind can inspire us to overcome all our problems by lessening our desires and feeling content with what we have. This is something that we are able to do.

As mentioned previously, the meditation technique involves withdrawing our mind from distractions. That means that during our meditation we need to put all our effort and determination into not allowing our mind to be influenced by any distractions. We need to try to maintain focus on the object that we choose to meditate on, which in this case is our breath.

For the next few minutes, having withdrawn our mind from all distractions, focus on the breath by mentally observing the inflow and outflow of our breathing. Just try to maintain the awareness and focus upon the breath without any distractions. *[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 strives for liberation

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

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.2. The way one gathers karma

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.2.2. How is it gathered

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.2.2.1. An explanation of who gathers the karma that projects one through cyclic existence

In our session last week, we covered identifying the individual who creates projecting karma, or the karma that projects an individual into the cycle of existence or samsara. As the text mentions, it is an ordinary person who creates that type of karma, as opposed to a superior being or an arya being. As mentioned in the text an arya being can accumulate virtuous and non-virtuous karma but does not accumulate the type of karma that projects them into future cyclic existence. That is because they have realised emptiness. The noble beings on lower levels called stream-enterers or once-returners are those who may accumulate non-virtuous karma.

The point, however, is that even though these noble beings do accumulate non-virtuous karma, they do not accumulate the type of karma that would propel them into the cyclic existence of either the happy or miserable realms because they have gained the realisation of selflessness or emptiness.

What is being specifically explained in the text is that the karma to propel or project ourselves into future cyclic existence is accompanied by strong grasping at the self. Without a strong grasping at the self, one could not accumulate the karma that would serve as a cause to propel one into a future cyclic existence. When one gains the realisation of selflessness or emptiness, that wisdom overpowers the grasping at self. Karma that is created with that realisation is not able to carry the weight, or the strength, to propel us into a future existence.

A noble being does not create that karma because they have realised emptiness or selflessness. They have achieved the realisation that overpowers grasping to a self.

The text further explains, 'Hence every ordinary person—from the highest level of the supreme stage of the Mahayana path of preparation on down—accumulates karma that impels rebirth in cyclic existence'.

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.2.2. How karma is gathered by them

So it is ordinary beings who accumulate the karma to be projected into future cyclic existence. The text then introduces an explanation of how that karma is accumulated, 'When those who are under influence of afflicted ignorance and the view of the perishing aggregates'. So, when under the influence of ignorance, when we are physically, verbally or mentally involved in non-virtuous karma such as killing, then that is how we accumulate non-meritorious karma. The stronger the grasping at the self, the heavier the karma that is accumulated under that influence. We can all relate to the sense of 'me' or 'I' that we have within ourselves. When we look into what influences us to create negative karmas, we can see that it has come about with a strong sense of a grasping at a self or what we call the 'I'. The stronger the grasping at the 'I' the more likely that the actions under that influence will be negative. As a consequence of at the self we think naturally about 'my body', 'my possession' or 'my friends'. That comes about initially from a sense of grasping at 'I' or self. Then we develop attachment to things that belong to the 'I' or self.

As we develop attachment to 'my' belongings, we develop a sense of aversion or anger to things that we think may harm the self or its belongings. This is how we create negative karma, particularly the karma that projects us into future existence. The karmic formation that is related to the second link within the twelve interdependent links is the karma that propels us into future existence.

The second link is dependent on the first link, which is ignorance. Again relating it back to ourselves, the ignorance that is the first link of the twelve interdependent links is grasping at the self. Due to ignorance we grasp at an inherently existent self. This results in physical, verbal or mental actions, which are carried out either through desire, attachment, or anger. Actions that are created out of anger or desire become the second link, which are karmic formations. It is really essential that we get a profound understanding of the twelve interdependent links and how we are propelled into cyclic existence.

Thus, the text explains, due to the influence of ignorance, when an individual becomes physically, verbally or mentally involved in a non-virtuous action, killing for example, they accumulate non-meritorious karma. Those who perform virtuous acts within the desire realm, such as practising generosity or maintaining ethical discipline, accumulate meritorious karma. Those who cultivate meditative states, such as meditative serenity or mental calm abiding, at the level of a meditative stabilisation of the form or the formless absorptions, accumulate invariable karma.

Question: Colleagues at work are patient with their clients but are nasty with each other. How does that affect their karma?

Answer: First of all try to understand why that may be so. It could be either because of a sense of competitiveness or it could be jealousy among themselves. Those negative states of mind lead them to the conflicts they have with each other. When two people are jealous of each other, when they have a sense of competitiveness with each other, then anger arises, which creates their conflict. Those states of mind are disturbing states of mind, which can lead to disruption and unease in the mind. So it is good for us to resolve to try and be free from those negative states of mind. However, the fact that they are able to be kind to others must mean that they also have some sense of caring and concern as well.

How do we apply the lessons of that situation to ourselves? As the Buddha explained, which is clarified in the *Abhidharma* text, to avoid becoming too negative when we see others in strife and conflict, we can try to see their delusions as being a fault, rather than the individuals themselves. That is very sound and good advice for us to adopt in our life. When we see faults in others, it is good to understand that their faults are due to their disturbing states of mind, their delusions, and it is not the person themselves who is at fault. By nature people are good, but their delusions make them have faults. It is the delusions we should see as faulty, not the person.

Thinking in this way is the best tool for developing patience towards others. For example, if a friend is starting to misbehave, rather than allowing that situation to disturb our mind and allowing ourselves to become agitated and disturbed, we can think 'my friend is a good person; that is why they are my friend. They are a good person by nature, but the reason they are acting out in a negative way right now is because of the delusions in their mind'. If we can think about that, then we won't disturb our own state of mind by losing our temper with them.

Question: Geshe-la explained earlier that trying to fulfil our desires can be a cause for a disturbed mind. While I agree with that, I also feel that having wealth can be a cause to help and do good for others too, so as a lay person how can we really know?

Answer: I regularly emphasise that it is good to understand that there is no fault with wealth itself. Material things themselves are not at fault. If material things are not at fault, then possessing wealth should not become a fault too. It is the delusions within the mind that turn pursuing material things into a fault. It is the delusions that we have to overcome, not wealth itself. As I mention regularly, we do need a certain amount of wealth to survive. If we did not have the sufficient means to sustain ourselves then we could starve to death! Also, if everyone were to give up desire, then how would the human race continue? There would be no union between male and female. So it would be difficult to answer if someone were to ask, 'Is it OK to end the human race and completely be empty of humans in this world?'

In terms of the human race, and particularly when we come to our own race and lineage, it seems that was important in the past, particularly when nations were

ruled mostly by kings and there were kingdoms. Kings seemed to have a lot of worries if they didn't have a son to be able continue their sovereignty.

Question: How do we talk to people with illnesses who don't understand karma?

Answer: There are different ways to talk with people who suffer from serious illness. For a religious person, for example, in Buddhist terms thinking about the three jewels or karma can definitely help to ease the pain, or being able to accept that pain. Contemplating like this may not remove the actual illness and the physical condition may more or less be the same, but a good mental attitude seems to actually help people to withstand and bear what is going on. Even though we can be physically suffering it's very much related to our mental state.

In relation to the negative state of mind of suffering that people experience in illness, it often seems that a person may start to speculate and make their illness much bigger in their mind. Beyond the actual reality of the physical situation; people may start to speculate and add many more fears and worries, which are all conjured up by their own mental state and attitude. It has nothing to do with the physical situation. Of course there may be some part of the body that gives those symptoms, but the extra fears and worry come from the mental attitude. Having that pessimistic outlook in life is created by our mind.

Meditation is effective at particular times of difficulty such as during illnesses. If we have maintained our practice, then at times of difficulty, such as during an illness, we can bring about a calmer state of mind and have a calmer outlook on the situation. Even though physically there may be illness, mentally we can have more peace and calmness.

As some patients have confided in me, even though it may be hard to actually keep the mind focussed when they are in pain, their attempts to meditate seem to bring more ease and comfort for the mind.

The advice that I gave to a late patient may not be suitable or appropriate for someone who is not thinking in Buddhist terms, but for someone who is inclined to think along the Buddhist principles, then the advice I gave to this particular patient seemed to really help their mind. When it was apparent that it was a terminal illness, then I advised the person to try to not to be too concerned with focussing on this life. Of course if we can have a long and healthy good life, then that is desirable; it is something that we all would like to have. But nevertheless, in relation to our future, this life is insignificant, and it is really quite short.

We need to try to contemplate the future more and lessen our concern for this life, which includes our immediate surroundings, and even grown-up children. People should not to be too preoccupied and worried about their children since they can care of themselves and take responsibility for themselves. Just focus on long-term happiness and long-term benefits, and try not to be too concerned with this life. Just try to think 'If I can stay longer and be a little bit more healthy, that's good. But if not, that's also fine because I can go onto a future life.'

Our future life is vast; this life is only one life in comparison to our many future lives. In the future there will be many lives yet to come, so don't become too attached to this one.

As this person confided in me, they found that advice to be really useful because, having done meditation and other practices earlier in their life when they were healthy and strong, they thought it didn't seem to serve much purpose; they didn't find much meaning in it. Whereas now in that state of terminal illness, whatever practice they do has much more meaning. They confided to me that it became clear that all the practices that they had done earlier was for this purpose, to be able to handle this difficult situation. And it does serve the purpose. Having reflected upon the practices that we have done, and whatever ability we have, we need to consider them as true friends. Don't be too concerned about leaving friends behind. Our relatives and friends are all temporary and we have to go on. But the one thing that we can continue to go on with is the meditation practices that we have done in the past and can continue to practise now. It definitely helps the mind.

Before we end the session for the evening, we can spend a few more minutes in meditation. As we sit in an appropriate relaxed posture, we withdraw our mind from distractions and focus upon the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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