
The Condensed Lam Rim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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As usual it would be good to spend some time in meditation. In order to engage in meditation, we adopt a relaxed posture. We emphasise a relaxed posture because, if the body is tense while the mind is focusing on a particular object, it will prevent the mind from focusing well. This is why we need to have a relaxed body. So whatever posture you find most comfortable is the appropriate one for your meditation.

Just as we pay attention to adopting a relaxed and comfortable posture, it is equally important to have a positive mind-frame. A positive motivation or mind-frame is one that is imbued with kindness. If we develop a kind attitude within our mind, then based on that kind attitude we can definitely accomplish something positive for oneself and for others.

Having a kind heart and attitude is important not just for our practice of meditation, but for all our activities. If we generate a kind attitude within ourselves, it can have a positive effect upon others when we encounter them in everyday life: walking along the street, sitting somewhere in the company of others, or interacting with them at a gathering. If we try to maintain a kind attitude, our physical gestures and every aspect of our mannerisms – the way we look at others, our words, our speech – will be influenced by that kind attitude. Thus, when we interact with others, we will have pleasing gestures, words and facial expressions that appeal to them. So, even our mere mannerisms will bring about a positive effect on others.

Having a kind attitude not only has a long-term positive affect on others, but can also provide sound protection for oneself. When we engage with others, if our physical, verbal and mental actions are based on a kind attitude, it will protect us. Having a kind attitude and being mindful of our actions when we interact with others is the best way of protecting oneself.

At this stage, many of you may agree with me about the benefits of having a kind attitude. However, the question may still arise: 'Although what the Geshe says sounds appealing, is it possible for me to have a kind attitude at all times?' We need to investigate the reasons why it could be possible and why it couldn't be possible: for both sides of the argument, we have to rely on logical reasoning.

It is up to us to maintain a positive attitude. On the one hand, we can allow ourselves to fall prey to negative states of mind, for example, allowing the mind to be dominated by a temperament based on agitation or anger. In this case, our physical gestures, words and

facial expressions in relation to others all become tainted with that negative mental influence. We know from our own experience the effect that unfriendly gestures and words will have on others. They are not welcome and seem inappropriate. We can definitely see this, can't we?

However, if we intentionally work on developing a more positive mental attitude based on kindness, then to the extent that we have developed a kind heart and concern towards others, our mannerisms and speech will appear in a much more positive light. When our relations with others are based on love and compassion, this outcome is evident.

So through investigating these two types of attitudes within ourselves, we can definitely develop analytical wisdom – the intelligence to be able to distinguish between positive and negative attitudes.

As I related earlier, if we can maintain a positive state of mind based on a loving and kind attitude towards others, whatever we do will have a positive effect on others as well as oneself. So there is a benefit on both sides – for others as well as oneself. Whereas when our attitude is influenced by a negative state of mind, this will have a negative effect upon oneself and others, making both others and oneself unhappy.

We would all have experienced the effects of anger on ourselves and others when it arises in our mind. However, the experience of the positive effects of our kind mind is perhaps not so common. This positive mind does not come about as easily as negative states of mind.

The main point that I am making here is the purpose of meditation. As discussed earlier, if one's state of mind is negative, that will definitely have negative consequences for others. Whereas if our mind is positive, it will have positive consequences for others. This is something to take note of.

When the effects of having a positive or negative state of mind become clear to us, we need to take on the responsibility of not allowing our mind to be influenced by a negative attitude. We need to adopt whatever measures we can to prevent the mind from being influenced by negative states, and adopt whatever methods we can to increase positive states of mind.

In the technique of meditation, we attempt to completely withdraw our mind from the distractions, the states of mind that have a negative influence on us. Here, withdrawing our mind means specifically to withdraw it from being influenced by what we call the distractions and delusions – basically the very busy mind of discursive thoughts in relation to the outside world.

Having withdrawn our mind from external distractions, we bring our focus inward to the inner object we have chosen to focus on, which in this case would be our own breath. We need to place our focus 100 per cent on the breath. To maintain our focus on the breath, we apply mindfulness – a state of mind where we constantly keep in mind the object we are attending to. So in this way we will spend the next few minutes just focusing on the breath. *[Pause for meditation]*

That should be sufficient for now. I am sorry to bring you out of your good meditative state. Some may feel: 'Just

when I am about to meditate well, something else is being mentioned!' [*Geshe-la laughs*]

In the same way we have attempted here, if we can make time to meditate regularly, it would be highly beneficial for one's life, particularly at times when one's mind is beginning to get quite disturbed. When the mind, for whatever reason, starts to get disturbed, at that point if one is not careful, it could bring grave consequences for oneself. At such times, it is really helpful for us to engage in some meditation practice to calm the mind down.

In other words, we should consider the practice of meditation as a real medicine for our mind when it is in an agitated and disturbed state. Meditation is really effective for relaxing the mind and bringing it back to a tranquil state.

The actual techniques of meditation practice are something we regularly talk about here, so most people would be familiar with those. But having learned some of the techniques of meditation, we need to implement them in our daily lives, and actually engage in some practice of meditation.

As mentioned previously, the primary goal of meditation is to generate a kinder heart, more concern for others. This is highly beneficial: the value of a kind heart cannot be underestimated. Having a kind heart not only brings peace and solace for oneself, but it also definitely has a positive affect upon others. We have to relate to others in whatever activities we do in life: whether it be a close relationship or otherwise, we constantly have to interact with others.

Since we have to interact with others, we might as well learn how to do it in a positive way that is beneficial for ourselves as well as for the other. As mentioned previously, when we are really disturbed and agitated, it not only affects us negatively, but it also affects our immediate surroundings. It definitely has a negative impact upon others who are around us. Thus we can see there is always an immediate twofold benefit when we practice and engage in the technique of meditation.

We can measure the profound, positive affect that the practice of meditation has in our life, not only in bringing about a peaceful mind, but in bringing about a greater understanding of others. Prior to having met with the meditation technique, we may have been in a situation where we were easily irritated and had a lot of problems. Then, after having come into contact with the technique of meditation and engaging in it, we may have begun to experience the positive affects of bringing the mind into calmer, more peaceful states.

Having practised the technique for some time, we will have begun to really appreciate these benefits, but we will also notice that we have developed a more profound understanding of others – what we call empathy – who appear to be in a disturbed state of mind. Not only do we have empathy, we also feel a genuine concern, kindness and love towards them. We can relate their situation to our own prior situation, when our own mind was in a disturbed state. Based on our previous experience, we can relate to that difficult time when we did not have the technique of meditation and when we really suffered a

lot. Now that we have benefited from practising meditation, when we see others who are suffering agitation, disturbance and so forth, we can see that they are suffering because they don't have control over their mind. So, instead of reacting negatively towards them, we can have a genuine understanding combined with a genuine sense of concern and love towards them.

For example, after we have come out of our meditation practice, if the situation arises where our partner, friend or loved one appears to be in a disturbed state and mentions things that otherwise might provoke us, instead of getting upset and angry about it, we would be able to develop a sense of love and compassion as a result of our practice of meditation. If we can promote a kind attitude within ourselves, a genuine concern for the other, that would be a very positive consequence of our practice, which would be of great benefit for the other.

When the other, out of a disturbed, agitated mind, starts to say or do things that are a bit unpleasant or irrational, if we can try to be a bit kinder and not retaliate with similar inappropriate gestures or words in response, the other will definitely feel the positive effect. They will start to appreciate that we are being tolerant of their inconsiderate ways, which are really due to a disturbance in their mind. Having recognised this, we can allow the other to go through whatever they are going through and support them with kindness and understanding. That will definitely have a positive effect upon the other.

Thus when they come out of whatever situation and state of mind they are in, they will start to really appreciate us; they will begin to trust us and appreciate our companionship because, rather than scorning them and distancing ourselves, we will have embraced them with kindness, with kind gestures and kind words. That will definitely be appreciated by the other. And from our own side, that would be the real measure of having developed the practice of patience. The practice of patience is that in which we don't retaliate negatively, mentally or physically, to an uncomfortable or unfavourable situation. The very definition of patience is the mind not being disturbed in the event of difficult situations. So, when we develop patience, our mind in particular, will not be disturbed.

Of course, as beginners, it is difficult for us not to be disturbed when someone we consider an enemy interacts with us negatively, and thus practice patience. But while initially it might be hard for us to endure, we can contemplate the fact that the other – even someone we consider an enemy – is acting in that way for no other reason than their mind is disturbed by anger. They are dominated by the negative state of mind of anger. When we realise that, it will definitely help us not to have such negative reactions.

On the other hand, in relating to someone we consider a close friend or companion, we should be able to practice endurance. It may not happen every day that they say and do things that are inappropriate, it may be only occasionally; therefore since they are our companion, someone we consider close to us, we definitely need to practice patience and understanding towards them.

As mentioned previously, we *do* need companionship, to have friends and to relate to others. So the reason why we need to take the initiative to practice patience by starting with those who are close to us now is that, if we practice endurance and practise patience with them, they will start to appreciate us more and more. Their trust in us will grow. Thus the mutual trust and friendship would only grow stronger rather than become weaker. This is how we can maintain friends throughout our life.

If we use these guidelines in our life, implementing all the points mentioned earlier, the best outcome will be that the companionship and the friendship will only grow become stronger. But in the event that the relationship does not work out, for whatever reason, there would be no strong regrets. And if the other had also been practising in this way, at least one would not blame them for the separation. Some people have confessed that: 'It is really from my side that I am not able to maintain that friendship. It's something I am lacking from my side. The other person has done their best'. So in relation to others, if we can practise in that way, we would not have strong regrets even if separation were to take place.

It is because of these positive effects in everyday life that I encourage you to do some daily practice of meditation. The practice will then secure the mind to become more subdued, less disturbed. The disturbed mind will start to lessen while the more joyful, positive attitudes would increase. Wouldn't that be a practical benefit?

We don't have that much time left from our session, but if some have questions, we could address those now.

Question: I have a friend in an untenable situation where she is being treated badly, putting up with something I don't think she should. There must be a point when at which someone can say, 'this is completely unacceptable'.

Answer: Of course, it depends on the person, whether or not they are able to accept the situation without feeling disturbed in their own mind. Even if the other says abusive things, if that person can withstand it, then from their side, it is a good thing. It is a good thing to be able to endure that abuse without a negative state of mind.

However, there could be the circumstance where someone endures abuse and criticism from the other because of attachment to them. If one is attached to them, then as far as enduring that abuse, I don't know what to say. I don't really have much to comment on that.

There might be another circumstance of enduring abuse and criticism because one sees that retaliating would lead to separation, and if separation takes place there might be long-term negative consequences. So to prevent these long-term negative consequences, a person might choose to endure the immediate difficulties.

To take an example, in a relationship where children are involved, one partner who feels the other is being a little bit irrational or critical or whatever, may put up with them in the interest of the children. They realise that if separation takes place, it might be difficult for the children, so they put up with that situation. Because they are doing this in the best interest of their children,

tolerating that situation and holding onto that relationship is being done with a good motivation.

Of course, with the situation of your friend, not knowing her and not knowing the situation, I can't personally comment on that.

There are some people who, from their own side, do the right things and do not pay too much attention to correcting their partner; they let them be how they are, while maintaining their own proper behaviour.

I am relating all this from others' comments and from those who have related their situations to me. It seems that in a committed relationship, if it is too rigid and disciplined, that can cause some difficulty. If there is a more relaxed approach to the relationship, some sort of freedom – not the freedom to do whatever one wants, but the freedom that comes from understanding each other's differences and needs – it seems the relationship can be more enduring.

It seems there are some who demand of everyone else in their relationships that they should be first priority – you know: 'I should be the number one in the other's life'!

We will conclude for the evening. Before we end the session, we can again spend a few moments in contemplation. This time we focus on the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's.

If you were to consider the points I have raised this evening, I've related what I feel would be useful in one's life. You may find something useful for yourself. But if you find nothing that was really useful, then like a piece of garbage, please don't throw it here but take it and throw it outside somewhere. *[laughter]* Before you get in your car, you could imagine that you are throwing it out on the road and it's gone.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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