
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 good to spend some time in meditation. For that purpose we sit in a comfortable and relaxed posture. As mentioned regularly, as we sit in a comfortable position it's also important to set the right state of mind. The purpose of meditation is to maintain and to protect the sense of joy and happiness that we have in our mind. It is really important for us to protect that joy and, because while we may have a sense of joy in our mind, as soon as something unpleasant occurs it can immediately disturb that.

As soon as we notice a state of mind that disturbs the joy in our mind arising it is important that we don't allow ourselves to be influenced by that state of mind, and go in the direction of thoughts that leave us in a state where we loose that joy.

The sense of joy in our mind is what opposes an unhappy or a sad state of mind. For as long as we can maintain a joyous mind, it will naturally, by its very presence in our mind, oppose and overcome a sad and unhappy state of mind. Thus a joyous state of mind is something that is definitely worth nurturing and maintaining.

The great master Shantideva has said that no matter what difficult circumstances I come to meet, 'By every means I will protect and maintain a joyous state of mind'. Shantideva is indicating that even in adverse situations that would normally cause sadness or unhappiness in the mind if one could be determined to maintain a joyous state of mind then these difficult circumstances will not become a cause to bring unhappiness and a feeling of distress to our mind.

As Shantideva has indicated, this is something that we need to put some effort and energy into. Being unhappy and distraught about any situation will not help to overcome that situation. If being sad or unhappy could actually prevent and overcome that negative situation it might be worthwhile to feel sad and depressed state. But the fact is that it will not help to overcome that negative situation. It is much more beneficial to maintain a sense joy within ourselves.

When we are naturally in a joyous state of mind we can clearly detect negative states of mind, such as jealousy or anger as soon as they arise in our mind. From our own experience we can see how these negative states of mind immediately disturb the sense of joy that we have within us. That is very clear and evident, isn't it?

There are situations where it is very obvious that negative states of mind will disturb a sense of joy not only for oneself but also for those around oneself, for example, where a few friends are gathered and enjoying a meal together. Initially such a gathering would be a joyous one. You are with friends. You are enjoying your meal. However, if an individual person within that group starts to become upset and angry that one person becoming upset will immediately affect the whole feeling within that group. It will disturb the joyous and peaceful feeling that was experienced earlier in the group. That is clear and obvious, isn't it? In this way we

can see the ill effects of negative states of mind such as anger and jealousy and that as soon as they arise they disturb a joyous and peaceful state of mind.

If we can recognise that we can prompt ourselves to try to deal with the situation when negative states of mind arise. As an ordinary being there will, of course, be situations where negative states of mind such as anger or jealousy or attachment will arise. That is the reality of being an ordinary person. While we are ordinary beings we cannot altogether prevent negative states of mind from arising. Nevertheless, we can work towards trying to prevent negative states of mind from escalating and becoming more intense or giving in to them. Initially that is done by recognising the negative states of mind as a delusion or negative state of mind. When anger arises in any situation we can immediately recognise it to be anger, which is a state of mind that will be harmful and destroy the joy and peace within oneself and others. By immediately identifying anger with its disadvantages and shortcomings, it will help the anger to subside and not allow anger to dominate our state of mind.

There are some basic techniques to deal with anger and not give in to it and let it dominate our mind. These techniques can help anger to subside when it arises. One technique would be to understand how anger arises. It arises when we meet an object that appears to be unappealing or unattractive. Coming into contact with an object that is unattractive or unappealing causes one to feel aversion towards the object and anger then arises. One of the specific techniques to counter that is to try to develop compassion towards the object. If it's a living being, the manner of developing compassion is to try to train our mind to see the object as being appealing and attractive to oneself. When one develops compassion towards the object it actually directly opposes the misconceived state of mind that sees the object as unattractive. Thus it helps to overcome anger.

Another way to regularly train ourselves to overcome anger is to familiarise ourselves with a state of non-anger. That means acquainting ourselves with a state of mind that is the opposite to anger, non-anger. Even though initially we might not find an immediate benefit, or we might not experience an immediate result, through familiarity and consistent acquaintance with the state of mind of non-anger we would come to a point where if we were to meet the object that normally causes anger to arise, an object which appears to be unattractive, that object may still appear to a certain degree to be unattractive but the anger that arises in relation to the object will not be as intense. After some time we would not experience such strong anger. As we train further in acquainting our mind with a state of mind of non-anger if we were to meet the object that normally causes anger we would not feel anger in our mind.

It is similar with attachment. Attachment is the opposite of anger. It exaggerates the attractiveness of the object and by seeing the object as extremely attractive we develop what we call attachment to the object. When one meditates and familiarises one's mind to see the natural unattractive aspects or features of the object, then through that familiarity we can come to a state where even if we were to meet the object, and even though it still appears to be attractive, attachment to that object will not arise within one's mind. The natural attractive features or aspects of the object will still appear to us just as they appear to even a foe destroyer, an arhat. A foe destroyer who has abandoned the delusions in their mind will still see an attractive object as being attractive but the difference would be that attachment will not arise in the mind in relation to that object. Even a

buddha would see an attractive object as being attractive. Its natural qualities, beauty, will still appear. But there is no attachment. As we train our mind in developing non-attachment we would come to a point of not feeling strong attachment towards the object.

We have touched on the techniques of trying to overcome the negative states of mind such as attachment, anger and ignorance. The specific states of mind presented in the teachings to familiarise ourselves with are the opposite of those states of mind. To overcome attachment we acquaint our mind with the state of mind called non-attachment. To overcome anger we acquaint our mind with a state of mind called non-anger. Likewise, there is a state of non-ignorance.

When the terms non-anger, non-attachment and non-ignorance are presented we may not get a real sense of what that state of mind actually is. A state of mind of non-anger may sound like just a mind of indifference or a mind that is not particularly active. However, what needs to be understood in this context is that a state of mind of non-attachment is actually a state of mind that directly opposes attachment and is actually an antidote to overcome attachment. That is how one should understand the meaning behind the word 'non-attachment'. Non-attachment is a specific state of mind that serves as an antidote for overcoming attachment. Likewise, non-anger is a state of mind that specifically serves as an antidote to overcome anger. Likewise, non-ignorance is a state of mind that serves as an antidote to overcome ignorance. This involves specific techniques, specific states of mind, that directly oppose these negative states of mind of anger, attachment and ignorance within us.

Certain techniques may help to reduce the delusions in our mind yet do not serve as a direct antidote. An example would be meditation focusing on our breath. Through our experience we would come to notice that when we focus on our breath all negative states of mind such as attachment, anger and ignorance reduce and are not active within our mind. However focusing on the breath itself is not the actual antidote for overcoming, for example, attachment and anger. As long as we focus just on our breath during our meditation session we may not experience attachment and anger but as soon as we come out of the meditation session we might find that these negative states of mind arise very intensely again. Thus it has not served the purpose of directly opposing those negative states of mind. Whereas when one familiarises oneself with the particular antidotes for overcoming particular delusions, such as meditating on non-attachment, then the more we familiarise ourselves with the specific technique of overcoming attachment by developing the state of mind of non-attachment the less intense attachment becomes. Gradually we'll completely overcome attachment within ourselves.

This is how one should understand these techniques in their proper context. This is how, as the great masters have mentioned, the result of having applied the proper antidotes in our meditation is that our mind becomes subdued. This is how we should understand it. The great masters have also advised that we need to tackle the most evident, the strongest delusion that is apparent in our mind at any time. Whatever delusion seems to be strongest in our mind, we try to deal with that first.

To summarise the main point mentioned earlier; we need to protect the joy in our mind. What opposes joy in our mind are the negative states of mind such as anger, jealousy, attachment etc. Thus, in order to protect the joy in our mind

we need to apply the appropriate techniques of meditation and engage in the practice of meditation.

Even though, as mentioned earlier, the technique of focusing on the breath is not a direct antidote for overcoming anger, attachment and so forth, nevertheless, it is a very appropriate technique for us beginners as a technique that helps to overcome the mind full of discursive thoughts.

The meditation technique that focuses on the breath is a very appropriate and relevant technique for us as a means to settle our minds from the distractions and discursive thoughts we have within ourselves. Initially it helps to settle the mind as well as make the mind fresh and clear. The clarity of one's mind becomes more apparent through this technique. Thus it is an appropriate and good technique for us to engage in. To re-emphasise the early point, we need to protect the sense of joy and happiness in our mind. In order to protect the sense of joy and happiness in our mind we have to recognise what disturbs the joy in our mind. Only by recognising that can we try to tackle and overcome those opposing factors.

We can call the factors that destroy our sense of joy distractions. It's because our mind is constantly distracted with worldly thoughts and objects that distraction itself becomes a way to disturb the sense of joy and tranquillity in our mind. In the technique of meditation we practise here we are intentionally withdrawing our mind from all the distractions and by temporarily withdrawing our mind from distractions we train our mind to remain in that sense of tranquillity and natural calmness within ourselves.

To undertake that meditation technique of temporarily focusing on the breath in our practice we need to make the commitment to ourselves that in order to get the benefit of this technique we must withdraw our mind from all external distractions as well as internal distractions, and all discursive thoughts. We completely withdraw our mind from these and focus inwardly.

Focusing inwardly means to focus on the internalised object that we use for our meditation that, in this case, is our breath. That means we try to regulate our breathing so that it is not too laboured and we don't feel the sensation of the breath on our nostrils. We try to adopt a very natural, unlaboured state of breathing so we won't be distracted by the external breath. If we were to feel a strong sensation of the breath on our nostrils our attention may go there and thus be distracted by that.

We imagine an internalised image of the breath and focus on that. That basically means keeping count of our breath. As we breathe in and breathe out we just stay aware of the breath coming in and going out and keep a mental count of our breath; mentally being aware of each breath coming in and going out. That awareness of the breath itself becomes the actual meditation. The specific advice is that as we become more familiar with the technique it is as if our mind has become one with our breath. It is as if our mind has immersed itself into the breath so there's no distinction between the breath and the mind that is focusing on the breath. That is how the technique presents the manner in which we try to focus on the breath.

The main point is to try to maintain a complete and full awareness, being completely mindful, of our natural breath going in and out and maintain full attention and focus on the breath. In this way, for the next few minutes, we'll adopt this technique of meditation. (*Pause for meditation.*)

It would be very, very beneficial for ourselves if we can adopt a regular practice of meditation in our lives. It is

important, however, to understand the technique properly before we actually engage in the meditation practice, particularly the point about the object. The object, as mentioned previously, is referred to as an internal object. What does an internal object mean? We may initially use an external object as an object to focus on. Right now we use the breath. We could, however, use an internal object such as a clock as an object to focus on to develop concentration. How does an external object like a clock become an internal object that one can focus on to develop concentration?

One does this by firstly taking in the features or characteristics of the external object and becoming familiar with it by looking at it. In the actual meditation what one attempts to do is to internalise the object that we have seen earlier. To internalise the object means to have a mental image of that object. Lama Tsong Khapa, the great master, refers to that as being the aspect of the object. The mental image or the aspect of the object *is* what we are focusing on not the object itself. The mental image is definitely an internal object. When one focuses single-pointedly on that mental image of the object one can then develop a sound concentration that can develop into a single-pointed concentration on the object.

Of course the external object still exists so one might think, 'What's wrong in focusing on the external object?' In order to develop concentration the instruction specifically says to focus on the internalised image of the object. It describes how the mind needs to reach the point where it's as if the mind becomes merged with the object itself. It becomes very clear here that with an internal object, a mental image, it is possible for the mind to merge with the object.

The specific technique is to focus on the internal object. We can give an example of a meditator who has developed concentration on the object that is called 'seeing the surrounding area as being filled with skeletons'. The object of this specific meditation technique is to overcome attachment. Focusing on the object of seeing the surrounding areas being filled with skeletons is something that the meditator would familiarise themselves with and the more the meditator familiarises themselves with that particular object the less attachment arises in their mind.

Through having used that as an object it is said that the meditator can actually develop concentration on that object. This is a single-pointed concentration called the single-pointed concentration of focusing on the surrounding area as being filled with skeletons. When we look into this it would not be the case that the actual surrounding area is filled with skeletons. However, at the same time, as it is a single-pointed concentration that concentration itself cannot be referred to as a wrong consciousness. It is a valid consciousness.

But one may think, 'Well, if the surrounding area is not filled with skeletons and the meditator is viewing the surrounding area as filled with skeletons, wouldn't that imply that he's actually having a wrong consciousness?' There is no contradiction here. The concentration of seeing the surrounding area filled with skeletons is a valid consciousness, and not a wrong consciousness. One must understand from the description of the technique that it is an internal image that the meditator has been focusing on, the mental image of the surrounding area being filled with skeletons. That is what the meditator would have been familiarising themselves with, focusing on and thus developing concentration based on that mental image. In that sense there would be no contradiction because the

mental image one wishes to familiarise oneself with is an image that one actually conjures up. This is the point one needs to understand.

The main point that one needs to understand is that the object that one is focusing on is an internal object. In describing what the internal object is one would need to have this clear understanding. In relation to the meditation technique we adopted earlier, which is focusing on the breath, even with the breath, or any object one focuses on to develop concentration has to be an internal object. So how do we actually make the breath an internal object?

It would not be the actual, physical breath that we focus on in the meditation. Instead it would be an internalised image of the breath and in order to emphasise the point that one should be focusing on an internalised image of the breath the technique presents that one should be counting the breath. Mentally counting the breath means that each time the breath comes in and goes out, that would be one count. In that way we mentally count the breath coming in and going out. That mental counting of the breath itself becomes the internal object of the breath. That is what is referred to as the internalised image or aspect of the breath that we are focusing on. It is important to understand this point as well.

As we seem to be nearing the end of our session for the evening, we could use the few minutes that we have left, for good questions if you have any.

Question: As I cannot see my breath, what is it that I am counting?

It's not the actual counting that one's focusing on but rather it is *as if* one's counting the breath. There's a particular point here. It's not the counting that we're focusing on, it's not the external breath but it's an internal breath and it's as if we're counting the internal breath, but we're not actually focused on the counting itself. We need to get an understanding of that.

If the breath seems to be hard to grasp as an object of focus don't be too concerned, as there are many other objects that we can focus on. We can focus on whatever object seems appropriate to us to develop concentration. In fact, to get that sense of the natural image it would be good to use an example of an external object such as a clock. The clock is an external object. After having studied the features of an external object such as the clock we focus on the mental image of the clock.

If you were to compare focusing on the actual clock versus focusing on the image of the clock you would find through one's own experience that there's a great difference. It is much more suitable for the mind to focus on the mental image of the clock rather than the actual clock itself.

Question: I can feel the sensation of the breath but what does having a mental image of the breath mean?

I can understand the complexity in relation to the breath because, as you mentioned, there is no physical aspect to the breath. It is not tangible. However, the breath does exist and we can feel it as we breathe in. Thus, when we breathe in and breathe out, which we are doing regularly, we settle into seeing or conjuring up, the mental image of the breath and counting apparently helps to maintain one's focus. When we count the breath, we'll come to notice and be aware of about the breath. It becomes a little bit more apparent to us. Actually the breath is not an easy object because it doesn't have a physical form. It would be the same meditating on impermanence or emptiness because there's no physical aspect or feature. It is actually a difficult object to focus on. Nevertheless, through familiarity, it seems that it will

become easier and it will become more apparent to us as an object.

One of the points made earlier was that Lama Tsong Khapa referred to 'the aspect of the object'. That's also true in relation to the breath. We can try to understand it's the aspect of the breath we focus on. That sort of understanding could also help us to get a little bit more of a grasp on what we're focusing on.

If we were to imagine the breath as we breathe in and out there is some sort of appearance of the breath in our mind. There is a sense that we're breathing in and breathing out. There is an appearance of the aspect of the breath to our mind, which is something that we can relate to.

Maybe it's hard to grasp what's being explained. Nevertheless you can rest assured that it will be possible, and that it will become apparent. Whatever familiarity you have with the practice now, you can be assured that if you just continue with that it will become clear. Don't worry too much about it.

Sometimes it seems that if one has already developed some familiarity with the practice of meditation and then when a further explanation is given and it is not clear, that can cause doubts to arise in the mind, which becomes an obstacle or a hindrance to the actual practice of meditation. So, regardless of whether the explanation is clear or not, do not doubt that the technique itself will work if you keep at it.

The main point is that whatever object one uses for the practice of meditation, developing concentration is being able to maintain a single-pointed focus on that object. It seems that there are some people who are actually able to focus, or concentrate, by looking at something. That may be possible for some people. However in our tradition, the suggested technique is that you focus on the mental image rather than the object itself.

Question: At the start Geshe-la was saying that one needs to protect the joyous mind. But how do we get a joyous mind to begin with? For example, when waking up in the morning the mind can feel very heavy and agitated?

The reason one does not have a joyous mind is because something is obstructing that the mind. The point I am making is that we all naturally have an inclination to have a joyous mind. If we're not feeling that joyous state of mind it is because something else is opposing it. So we must recognise what is opposing the joyous mind at that moment.

As mentioned in a previous session, a good way to try to connect with that joyous state when we wake up in the morning is, as a religious person, to have some practices such as saying some mantras. That could be helpful to try to generate a state of joyous mind and maintain it throughout the day. Even maybe singing, rather than allowing what usually happens as the mind starts becoming concerned with different worries. The mind becomes filled with different concerns and worries and this brings a sense of a weighed down mind. We tend to lose the sense of the joy in the mind. If one were to just sing that could distract you from the negative and keep you focused on something joyous, rather than all the other worries. So even singing could help keep a sense of joy.

Apparently some people sing in the shower. That is a good way of not feeling bogged down with worries. Singing in the shower can help your mind give up the worries for a while.

What happens is that if we're too concerned with the initial sense of a lack of joy in our mind, which causes further unhappiness and anger to arise in the mind. That just makes things worse. If we start the day feeling a lack of joy then,

rather than contributing to that by feeling irritated and angry, we can do something to take our mind off whatever we're concerned about and feel bogged down with. Forget about that and do something different. A mantra or singing can help to lift us out of that state.

The techniques that I present seem to have been useful for others. I've heard many accounts of how they have been useful. Just the other day I spoke to a dad who had sought my advice some time ago for a difficulty he had in trying to maintain the temperament of his daughter. I had advised him then that maybe it's good to try to make your daughter be a little more relaxed. Maybe take her on a holiday somewhere. Try to make sure she eats well and try to please her with good meals and make her feel relaxed and so forth. If you can try to pay a little bit more attention to her concerns it might help to appease her and she might come a little bit out of her temper. Just the other day the father confirmed to me that the techniques worked. His daughter is now feeling much more together and much more relaxed. Having followed the advice seems to have helped. Sometimes conventional techniques of relaxing, having a good time, taking good care of each other can help.

When anyone you have a relationship with is feeling uncomfortable then it is our responsibility, to the best of our ability, to help him or her. We all have a sense of what can help. We have a sense of what can contribute to their joy and what contributes to them feeling more uncomfortable and miserable. It is our responsibility to try to help them and find ways and means to lift up their mind.

The techniques that I share seem to be useful for many people. I get many reports back saying it seems to be helpful and that it works. So it seems to be worthwhile.

The very fact that someone is your partner or friend means that you will try to help him or her in times of difficulty. The times of difficulty would be when they are not feeling all together. They're a little bit sad or not feeling together mentally. That is the time we should try, in their best interests, to provide help. That would make good sense in the relationship. When we observe others we can see that certain things are appropriate and certain things are inappropriate. Appropriate things are measures that make us happy. Certain things make us unhappy. Just as we can identify that in relation to how we feel about other's activities towards us we can know those are the same things that we need to adopt in pleasing others.

I regularly mention that if your friend or partner is feeling upset and not together mentally that if you prepare a nice meal and present the meal to them with a joyous, nice smile it will definitely help them to calm down and start to become more joyous and happy.

The main point that I regularly emphasise is that as a human society we definitely need to contribute to each other's well-being. This applies to our immediate relationships as well as the wider community. We need to try to adopt whatever ways and means we have to try to contribute to the well-being of others. We all have a certain ability to help and benefit others. To whatever degree it may be, we have that potential. It is worthwhile that we use that.

Before we end the session we can spend a few minutes in contemplation, this time focusing on the sound of the mantra being recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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