
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 will adopt an upright and comfortable position.

As we are quite familiar with the meditation technique, it would be good to reflect on the purpose of meditation. First, if we were to consider the importance of human life, we would all acknowledge and understand how important our life is. If we were to then consider why our life is precious, I feel that all comes down to the fact that this life provides us with the potential to have some joy and happiness. It is worthwhile once in a while to contemplate why we consider our lives as precious. If we consider how much effort, time and energy we put into protecting and cherishing our body and sustaining the well-being of our mind, this also shows us how we each consider our life to be precious.

Of course, besides cherishing our own body and mind, we do have other things that we cherish, such as our immediate family, children, and our possessions. But when we consider the time and energy spent in cherishing the other things in relation to sustaining one's own well-being, what we really cherish is our own life. That is something that, without any doubt, we all naturally feel.

The faults of self-cherishing

First and foremost we cherish oneself – which includes one's body and mind, and one's life – then cherishing others comes secondary. However when we look into how we cherish others, we will notice that it can have an element of love and compassion. Whereas if we were to investigate how we cherish ourselves, we will notice that cherishing oneself is very much done with a notion of strong attachment and strong grasping at the self. When cherishing oneself is influenced by strong grasping at the self, that is when cherishing oneself is not considered a virtue because, according to the Buddhist teachings, cherishing oneself with that strong sense of grasping at oneself becomes the cause of the unwanted problems we experience. Cherishing oneself involves a self-obsession, self-centredness.

If we were to acknowledge and accept that indeed we are very self-centred, obsessed with our own well-being, and entirely focused on oneself, then this is what we call in Buddhism 'self-cherishing'. When we notice that we have self-cherishing – which has an element of grasping at one's self – then we need to ask ourselves, "Does cherishing myself really contribute to the genuine well-being of my physical body and mind – or not?" We need to investigate that.

As we investigate whether that sense of cherishing oneself – which, as mentioned earlier, is combined with the sense of clinging to oneself and self-centredness – contributes to our well-being, we would slowly begin to notice that, ultimately, it does not.

Here we need to understand that when we say the self-cherishing attitude does not contribute to one's well-being, we must not misinterpret that by thinking, "I should not pay attention to myself at all". Of course, one's life and well-being is precious, and one has to take one own well being into consideration. But the problem arises when consideration of our own well-being is done with the element of self-cherishing that was mentioned earlier, in the Buddhist context – that is, focusing on our own well-being at the expense of others.

Because that self-cherishing attitude is influenced by self-centredness, we tend to shut out the outside world, and start to narrow our attention to just ourselves, cutting ourselves off from any concern for the welfare of others. We become self-obsessed: obsessed with our own personal well-being. This leads to us have all kinds of suspicions, worries, doubts, and so forth. We begin to doubt and suspect others. Being obsessed with oneself brings these unwanted states of mind: worries, doubts, suspicion about others, and so forth. One can even begin to doubt oneself and thus become confused. This is the Buddhist explanation of how the attitude of self-centredness leads to more problems and mental conflicts within oneself.

Replacing self-cherishing with compassion

As we begin to understand how self-centredness and the self-cherishing attitude is the cause of all our problems, as explained in the teachings, we also begin to understand how substituting that self-cherishing with cherishing others – developing a real sense of love and compassion for others' well-being – becomes the real source of happiness, even for oneself. When we develop that sense of love and compassion for others, we begin to really open up our mind, allowing it to become more expansive, leading to a sense of ease within oneself. The point is that, whether we cherish others or whether we cherish oneself, when it is done with a genuine sense of caring, a genuine sense of compassion – in relation to others, as well as in relation to oneself – then that becomes the source of real happiness and well-being, for oneself and others.

So, as we reflect further, we begin to notice that the attitude of cherishing oneself at the expense of others – neglecting others and just being self-centred and focused on oneself – leads to all of our problems. Then we notice that the way to escape that trap of self-obsession is by developing love and compassion. Thus the most crucial element for developing one's own well-being is developing that genuine sense of love and compassion. When we develop a genuine sense of love and compassion towards others, that leads to a genuine sense of well-being and ease within oneself.

Of course, as mentioned earlier, we do need to protect and look after ourselves. When this is done out of a sense of compassion, even for oneself, it becomes a real source of well-being for oneself. Thus compassion can be related to others, but it can also be practised in relation to oneself. That element of compassion is the basis of really taking care of our needs. So, in relation to our own well-being and that of others, the key is generating a genuine sense of love and compassion.

If we take time to reflect on these facts, we will develop the conviction that love and compassion are the real source of our well-being. We will begin to notice that whenever we face great problems and difficulties in our life, there is a link between having a diminished sense of love and compassion towards others and the extent of the difficulties and

problems we face. We must investigate and reflect on this connection.

Otherwise, we may think, "As far as I'm concerned, everything's fine", despite having problems. In this case, we would not be acknowledging that the cause of our problems is our neglect in developing love and compassion for others. There is definitely a connection. If we investigate, we can see that the more we shut others out from our life and the more self-focused and self-centred we are, the more problems, anxiety, and so forth, we experience. Therefore, the real source of our problems boils down to our self-centeredness and lack of compassion for others as well as oneself.

On the other hand, the more we develop a sense of compassion and consideration for others, the more we increase our sense of well-being. As the teachings mention, our well-being definitely depends on an attitude love and compassion within oneself.

Compassion - the infallible companion

We can safely conclude that when we face great difficulties, the one who will help us is the one with a genuine sense of concern based on love and compassion for us. A person who has anger towards us is not going to help us; neither will someone with strong attachment towards us. In relation to attachment, if we have a friend whose friendship with us is based on a mere fleeting attraction, whenever we face difficulties and problems, they are likely to neglect us, because that friendship has a shallow basis. They will start to avoid us rather than stepping forward to help us. Rather, the friend who will help us at such times will be one who has a genuine sense of concern for us.

If we take an example of how our very life is sustained by love and compassion, we can look at the beginning of our life, first when we were a baby, then growing up to be a child. It was the love and compassion of our parents – our mother and father – that actually sustained us, nourished us, at these times. It was due to our parents' kindness that we were able to grow through childhood, when we were so vulnerable to the elements. After we grow up – as we mature, reach middle age and get older – again we are totally dependent on others' kindness, love and compassion, because as an elderly person, we will be unable to take care of ourselves adequately. Again it is very clear how we depend on the love and compassion of others at that time.

When we begin to look into these examples from our own life, we will understand that the attitude of love and compassion, of genuine concern, is infallible – meaning that its purity and truthfulness is infallible and its benefit is certain. We can completely trust that attitude of love and compassion. Contrast this to an attitude such as attachment. Attachment is not a trustworthy attitude; we cannot completely rely on it and trust it. When we begin to understand that, our priority in life will be the keen wish and determination to develop love and compassion within oneself, and seek others who have love and compassion as companions. At the same time, we will reduce our sense of attachment, because it is destructive, not trustworthy and unreliable. This is how we can benefit from such an investigation.

The reason why love and compassion are genuine and infallible is because they are based on reality and truth; whereas the attitude of attachment is not based on truth and reality. That is the difference between those two attitudes: one is trustworthy and infallible, and the other is not trustworthy.

To explain this further, we can see what happens when one develops a sense of compassion, for example, for someone who is suffering. We can recall here how there are different levels of suffering, but in this case, we will relate it to the first level of suffering, the suffering of pain and unease. When we see others in pain and ill-at-ease, if we have some concern for others, naturally we will start to feel a sense of how unfortunate it is that this person is experiencing unease. We think, "How wonderful it would be if they were free from that". Compassion is defined as the wish for others to be free from suffering. And just as we have that wish for the other to be free from suffering, the reality is that they are suffering, which is an unwanted experience from their perspective as well. Thus love and compassion are based on reality.

The faults and misinterpretations of attachment and anger

The attitude of attachment, on the other hand, is not based on reality and is false. The way attachment perceives the other is as being appealing and attractive. Here one may ask, "Isn't the other attractive? Don't they have some natural attributes of attractiveness and beauty? Isn't that a reality?" But we have to make a clear distinction, as explained in the teachings: there are definitely some attributes of attractiveness or beauty in the object, but what attachment does is to exaggerate those qualities. So attachment exaggerates the qualities of the object beyond reality.

One needs to understand that Buddhism does not deny the attractiveness of the object: there is an attribute of attractiveness. Regarding ourselves, if someone were to say, "You're not attractive", we could get really upset! One might also think to oneself, "But, I am quite attractive." *[Laughter]*

We need to really understand this claim in the Buddhist teachings that attachment is a wrong attitude, a wrong conception. Attractiveness and beauty is not being denied as reality in Buddhism. But rather when the perception of the person or object is tainted by strong attachment, the mind gets influenced by what is called "incorrect attention" which is a faulty state of mind that makes us perceive the object in an exaggerated way. While there is a basis of some good qualities – attributes of beauty or attractiveness on the object – when one perceives the object with attachment, it exaggerates those qualities and attributes. That is because of the incorrect attention that influences our perception.

Thus what is being explained in the teachings is that the way in which attachment perceives those qualities or attributes is not true, it is faulty. That is how the attachment is proven to be a wrong conception.

This is also true for the state of mind of anger. When one has strong anger towards another person, again the mind is influenced by incorrect attention, which influences the mind to perceive the object as completely devoid of good qualities. Thus anger is the complete opposite of attachment: one views the object as having no redeeming qualities or attributes and as being completely repulsive. That again is not based on reality and truth. Therefore a mind of intense anger towards an object is also a faulty state of mind, a wrong conception.

Actually, besides these technical explanations, we would have all had an experience of viewing an object with intense attachment. If we were to reflect on how we viewed an object with a strong infatuation, we would recall seeing the object as beautiful and attractive in every aspect. If it were a person, we would have thought, "Everything about them is perfect". As time passed, however, our attachment may have

started to wane. Then we would have viewed the very same person in a different way, a way that we'd not seen them before. We could understand, then, that the way we viewed them was not true.

Again, with anger, if we refer to a time when we had strong anger towards someone, how did that person appear to us? They would have appeared to us as entirely at fault, and repulsive in every way. Later, when our anger had started to subside and we saw that same person again, we would notice that the earlier perception of them was not true at all. We can ask ourselves, "How did we think that way?"

His Holiness the Dalai Lama often mentions these points. He says that when we are not under the influence of strong emotions such as attachment and anger, and reflect upon our behaviour during times in the past when we had strong attachment or anger, we would actually start to laugh at our own folly, at how we acted when we were influenced by strong attachment or anger. That is because of how we always exaggerate the situation by faulty states of mind, upon which we then act.

There was one great master who said that when our mind is influenced by attachment and we are infatuated with an object, our mind begins to play tricks with us. Even if there are faults in the object, our mind of attachment blinds us from the faults, and makes only the good qualities of the object appear to us. For as long as we only see the object's attractive, good features, our attachment will become stronger. Then we will probably trust attachment because we think we've seen only the good qualities of the other. But what happens in the process of viewing the object is that our faulty state of mind hides the object's faults. That is how the mind of attachment works in relation to perceiving and believing in the object.

Based on what we have just covered, because attachment and anger are both faulty states of mind, I regularly advise my friends to be very cautious when they notice they are being influenced by strong anger or attachment. One must be very cautious at those moments. Particularly if one notices strong anger arising, it is best not to make any crucial decisions at such times because they could be quite disastrous. When anger arises, it's best not to make any decisions – just be very careful, very cautious.

It's the same with attachment. However, the difference between attachment and anger is that, with attachment, there can be some benefit in relation to others, because out of attachment one may actually start doing some good things for others! One could argue, "Maybe attachment is OK". However, what is being pointed out here is that if one's decision is based entirely on strong attachment, it can also be disastrous for oneself. There may be some temporary benefit initially for the other, but if we were to weigh the benefit and harm that we do to others, we could end up creating much more harm than benefit. So again, when one notices the mind being influenced by strong attachment, be very cautious and try not to make any important decisions based on attachment.

When either anger or attachment is prevalent in our mind, at that time we need to be cautious and not make important decisions. That is what I try to remind people to take to heart.

Going back to the earlier point, when we cherish and protect ourselves and others, it must be based on a genuine sense of concern, love and compassion, rather than on an attitude of

attachment or anger or any other clinging, grasping attitude. That is the main point that I have been making.

In relation to oneself, as we do have a genuine concern for our own well-being, we will come to realise that our well-being has two aspects: physical and mental. We protect our physical well-being by following the right measures, the proper ways of looking after our health and so forth. We protect our mental well-being by developing positive attitudes and so forth. So we need to pay attention to these two aspects of our well-being.

Protecting our physical well-being

We are quite skilled at looking after our physical well-being. In fact, when we think about it, almost our entire energy is spent looking after our physical well-being! We spend a lot of time and energy investigating the best kinds of food, drink and nourishment for ourselves; that is something at which we are very skilled. We also need companionship, clothing and a home to maintain our physical well-being. We are very skilled at providing these things for ourselves because we spend so much time and energy on them.

Of course, it is difficult for us to maintain our physical well-being if we fall ill or contract a disease. Also, if we don't have the means to acquire the appropriate material conditions, it becomes a little difficult for us to maintain our physical well-being. When we lack the appropriate conditions for our physical well-being, we suffer on the physical level. That is something we can all relate to. But for most people here, we can safely assume that we are quite skilled and we have the capacity to look after our physical well-being. So, as far as the physical conditions are concerned, we are not lacking.

Protecting our mental well-being

Now we come to our mental well-being. Again, many factors contribute to our mental well-being. There's no question that we all naturally want to feel joyful, happy and calm. No one wishes to experience worry, anxiety and depression. So, as far as our mental well-being is concerned, we need to find the means to maintain it. That's something we can all agree on. What, then, prevents mental well-being, and causes our mind to be in turmoil, subject to depression, sadness, worry, fear and all the unwanted mental states? The great Indian Buddhist master Vasabandhu wrote that the immediate cause of all our mental disturbances is a distracted mind.

Of course, all the Buddhist teachings, from every tradition, accept that, ultimately, it is karma that causes our mental disturbance and unease. However, as an ordinary person, it's hard for us to relate to how karma is the cause, because it seems quite remote. When we talk about karma or when karma is explained in the teachings, it goes beyond this life to past lives, something that we can't immediately relate to. But Vasabandhu explains that all the immediate disturbances in our mind actually come from a distracted mind. That is a sound and unique instruction, something we will all be able to relate to. If we really investigate within our mind, we will be able to make that connection – that all our mental turmoil, all our unwanted and unhappy states of mind are related to the distracted mind. Distraction here means having a lot of different conceptual thoughts in our mind.

We need to understand that connection. A distracted mind includes what are called the conceptual thoughts focused on worldly concerns; some translations also include superstitious thoughts, which means irrational fears, worries and so forth. In fact, a distracted mind is actually an

irrational mind. If we look within ourselves, we would notice how a distracted mind leads to all sorts of unwanted states of mind – worry, fear, confusion, depression, and so on. They all stem from a distracted mind, a mind that is never still, but constantly busy, always preoccupied, always following one thought after another.

One analogy is that the distracted mind is like a small piece of paper blown around by wind – it is blown in every direction, finally ending up in a small corner and being stuck there! It can't go anywhere because it's completely stuck in a corner. That's how we become when we have all these conceptual thoughts. Our mind is completely distracted, then suddenly we come to a corner in our mind where we feel completely stuck. Suddenly we feel completely confined within our thoughts, a state where we become depressed, lose confidence, and so forth.

When we are able to make that connection, the next question that will arise in our mind is, "OK, I can understand that. But is it possible for my mind to be free from the distractions? Is it possible to reach a state of mind that is calm and in equilibrium?" According to the Buddhist teachings, we can say it is definitely possible to free ourselves from that distracted state of mind.

When we begin to analyse the distracted mind, we see that basically it is a mind over which we don't have any control. We just let it go where every thought and whim takes it. That means that we have not taken control. We have not got a grip on our focus and mind, and are not able to bring it inward. Therefore, for as long as we allow the mind to go in every direction, distractions will arise.

The next question that arises is, "Is it possible for us to bring our focus and attention inward, and maintain that? Is there a method or not?" In the Buddhist teachings, this is where the technique of meditation comes in. Meditation is a method for bringing the mind inward, and maintaining one's focus within oneself. As one begins to understand the actual technique of meditation, one will begin to notice that it allows one to withdraw one's mind from all distractions. The process of withdrawing our mind from all conceptual thoughts and distractions naturally brings our mind and focus within oneself.

Meditation - the technique

As we become more familiar with the practice of meditation, we begin to really develop that ability to focus and concentrate on an internalised object. Because the technique involves withdrawing our mind from all distractions and bringing it inward, we need to choose an internal object on which to focus. The longer we train our mind to focus on that internalised object, the more we can develop a mind of concentration. All of us already have the basis to do that, but as we train further and develop that concentration, naturally our mind will start to become free of distractions. As a result, it will be free from confusion, worries and problems, and so forth. Thus in a meditative, in a concentrated state, we are in a calm and peaceful state.

Now the question may arise, "What happens when I come out of meditation? How do I deal with problems when I am outside in the normal world?" Here the Buddhist teachings offer us a tool to protect us outside of meditation: wisdom. The wisdom invoked here is a particular kind of wisdom called analytical wisdom – basically the intelligence to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong. Reflecting upon all the earlier explanations – about looking into how anger arises, attachment and how it views the

object, all the faults and the disadvantages of these states of mind – then thinking about how they are true is done by the mind of wisdom. So when we are outside of the meditative concentrated state, it is wisdom that will protect us from adverse, negative situations. Concentration and wisdom become the main tools to protect our well-being.

Conclusion

Before our session ends for the evening, we will take whatever time is left to actually engage in meditation, focusing on an internal object. The object that focus on here is our own breath. We try to develop a mental image of the breath as we breathe in and out. We imagine seeing the breath and just keep our attention and focus on the breath. It is also helpful to count each breath.

Focusing on our breath involves intentionally withdrawing our mind from all distractions. We need to make that decision in our mind, to have the disciplined mind that decides, "I am not going to allow my mind to be influenced by the thoughts and distractions that may come up. I am not going to let my mind follow them. Rather, I will bring my full attention and focus inward, and place it upon the image of my own breath." In that way, we will maintain our focus on the breath for the next few minutes. *[Pause for meditation]*

Maintain our inward focus, this time we shift it to the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. We just try to maintain our focus on that.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed from tape by Peter Boothby
Edit 1 by Mary-Lou Considine
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
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