
The Condensed Lam Rim

ལྷན་སྐྱེས་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བཞུགས་སྒྲིག་།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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As the Buddha mentioned, a subdued mind is a happy mind. This could be the one phrase that sums up the purpose of meditation. If one subdues one's mind, one will have a happy mind and the reverse is also true. If someone does not have a subdued mind there is no happiness for them to experience. If we think about it we can gain some understanding from that.

In order to reflect upon the implication or real meaning of this statement, we need to first consider the great potential we have within ourselves. We notice that there is the potential for destruction and negativity within oneself too. It seems that our mind always carries these two sides; a positive side with positive potential and a negative side with the potential to harm. For us what is important is to recognise these two sides; the positive and the negative.

The reason it is important for us to recognise these two sides is because when we are able to distinguish between the positive and the negative aspects within one, we will be able to naturally recognise what is it that we need to adopt and what it is that we need to discard. The practice of Dharma essentially entails the positive things that we need to adopt, and negative aspects that we need to discard. That is something that will become clear to us.

To put it simply, we will be able to clearly distinguish which things are beneficial to our wellbeing and thus need to adopt, and which things are detrimental to our well-being and that we need to discard. That becomes very clear in our mind and with that clear understanding we can develop a very sound direction in our life. That is to engage in a practice that involves adopting and further cultivating the positive states of mind, and discarding what is harmful for us.

As we slowly begin to engage in that process we will begin to notice for ourselves that this process brings about a result whereby we feel stronger within ourselves, more courageous and more determined. Other positive consequences will be that our mind becomes clear in a state of well-being. A genuine sense of joy in one's mind will also naturally increase. If we experience that in our life, then that is really what we are hoping for.

However, we would also notice that while we may be able to distinguish and recognise certain positive things within ourselves, such as genuine concern for others and genuine kindness, we might find that it is quite difficult to apply them in daily life. On the other hand we seem to easily fall victim to the negative states of mind and are easily influenced by them. That is something that we will also notice.

While it may be difficult to perpetually maintain a positive state of mind and discard the negative states of mind within oneself, if we pay attention to looking within and trying to identify the distinction between a positive state of mind and negative state of mind, we will begin to notice that the main cause of our angst and depression lies within one. That is something we will begin to recognise. That recognition itself will help to prevent one putting the blame upon external situations.

Normally when we feel uneasy, for whatever reason, we have the habit of blaming an external situation or other people. That is due to our habituation with this way of thinking. We immediately seem to identify an external cause for one's disturbances and feeling uneasy with oneself. As long as we allow that to happen and allow ourselves to be influenced by thinking that external situations cause our unhappiness, we will never be able to protect our mind from feeling weighed down and depressed. We will not be able to overcome all the external conditions and causes to prevent oneself from feeling that way.

The reality is that while external conditions do serve, to a certain extent, as a condition for one to be somewhat disturbed some times, the main cause lies within oneself. It is an attitude within oneself. When one feels disturbed because one feels hurt there might be an external condition that causes this, but along with that external condition it is a state of mind that is the main cause for one feeling hurt. If one pays attention to one's mind one would see that even though there might be an external incident that may have initially been a condition for us to feel hurt, what happens is that our mind starts adding more and more reasons. It feeds that initial unease within us. It makes it increase so that we start feeling more and more weighed down and depressed.

If we are able to recognise that it is actually a negative state of mind that is the real cause for our disturbance and feeling hurt then, when an external condition occurs that serves as condition for one to feel hurt, even though initially one might be little bit hurt, one will be able to prevent oneself from escalating that situation within one's mind. Even though there is an external condition that may cause some internal hurt and disturbance one will be able to maintain some integrity to protect oneself and not give in to one's superstitious mind and escalate that situation. Even though we may feel a little bit hurt and disturbed initially one will not be influenced by that to the extent of being completely weighed down and feeling depressed. One will, instead, be able to maintain one's state of mind in a positive way. That is already a great benefit.

When we are able to successfully recognise an internal attitude or state of mind that is the main cause for one to feel disturbed and hurt and, in the worst case, very depressed, that wisdom will help us protect our mind when there is an external condition that disturb us. Normally when there is an external condition that causes some disturbance and we feel hurt and depressed we add on more fuel to that situation and escalate the unease within oneself to the point where certain people, even if

they are not religious, feel they want to just leave everything behind and go into some form of solitude.

Some people from normal walks of life have confided in me that even though they have lot of money and a good job and everything going well in relation to external conditions, they however seem to lack a sense of real inner joy. There are times that these external conditions don't prevent them from having problems with others. It seems that they come to a point where all the external things such as phone calls and the dealings with their work and business and everything become a nuisance. Some individuals have confided in me that they just want to leave everything behind and perhaps go off into the mountains or the forest where there are no phone calls, no people and so forth to deal with.

Whether these individuals would actually go into solitude and survive in that way is questionable. Nevertheless they come to a stage where they feel that this may be a good option. That clearly shows that they are still in a state of mind where they feel that external conditions are the main cause of their problems. They feel that people, business dealings and phone calls, all of that is the cause of their disturbances. They have not been able to recognise yet that it is actually an internal state of mind that escalates and exaggerates the external conditions. In fact the cause is really inside their mind.

Individuals who have been able to recognise, through practice or just through reasoning, using their intelligence and wisdom to look within themselves, are able to clearly recognise that the actual cause for all their problems is not entirely external conditions but rather an internal state of mind and attitude. With that recognition one will be able to gain some strength and stamina within oneself even when external conditions are not going too well. One will be able to maintain some equilibrium within one's mind and a sense of joy can remain in one's mind. That is the real protection for one.

This internal investigation, which serves as a cause to develop the acute intelligence that we call analytical wisdom, is the real basis for one's well-being. It protects one's integrity and one's joyous and happy state of mind, in whatever situation one may find oneself in. Regardless of whether we consider ourselves religious or not, regardless of whether one believes in a future life or not, everyone equally wants to have a happy state of mind, a joyful state of mind. For someone who believes in a future life and future well-being their main consideration is a happy and joyful state of mind now as well as in the future. Someone who does not believe in a future life cannot deny the fact that they want to have a joyful and happy state of mind now. So, in every respect, this is something worthwhile. It is quite obvious that we would all agree that we want a happy, joyful state of mind. It is because of this fact that I stress that meditation is something that is useful for everyone. Regardless of whether one considers oneself religious or not, regardless of whether one believes in a future life or not, meditation is definitely a useful technique to bring about a happy state of mind.

We can consider how one actually obtains a peaceful state of mind. First of all, let us consider the fact that when we

have been engaged in a very busy city life with work and so forth if one were to take a break and go to the country side, one initially feels very relaxed. One feels very relaxed because one is out of all these normal chaotic situations. While we may feel temporarily relaxed one will notice that soon we will start feeling a bit restless again [*Geshe-la laughs*]

When one finds oneself becoming restless again that is a result of the distractions that one is familiar with. Even when one is out of the normal busy situation, one would still be prone to being influenced by distractions. Even in a quiet place or somewhere where there is not this normal busy business, one will give in to distractions and they will cause restlessness within oneself. For as long as we have a distracted mind it will eventually make us feel restless and disturbed. One's mental state will lack a sense of real peace within oneself.

When, from one's own experience, one begins to notice that this is a reality, then the technique of meditation will start to make more sense as a real method for acquiring a genuine sense of peace within oneself. This is because the meditation technique involves distancing ourselves from all forms of distractions. For the duration of the meditation we intentionally withdraw our mind from the preoccupation of being influenced by the distractions and bring our full attention and focus within ourselves. As we bring our full attention and focus within, we are preventing our mind from being influenced by the distractions. As a result one naturally starts to feel a genuine sense of calmness and peacefulness. That, of course, comes with familiarity. That is the result that we would experience as we familiarise ourselves with the practice of focusing inwards.

One feels calm and tranquil as a result of the practice of meditation because in an appropriate practice of meditation one acquires the physical condition as well as the mental condition to experience a tranquil and peaceful state of mind. On the physical level one is withdrawn from the physical activities that normally cause lots of distraction and lots of stress. In the formal practice of meditation, as we sit in an appropriate posture it naturally prevents us from engaging in physical activities. Likewise as we bring our attention inwards the result of withdrawing our mind from all forms of internal distractions is that it will prevent the mind from engaging in distractions.

Normally when we are disturbed it is either due excessive physical activities that we engage in or the mind being completely obsessed with distractions. When both levels have been withdrawn then the natural consequences is to experience tranquillity. What is important to note is that of the two causes for our disturbances, physical activities and the mind filled with superstitious distractions, withdrawing the mind from the influence of the distractions is of primary importance. We can observe that individuals who have trained their mind through successful meditation can be engaged in quite seemingly busy activities but, if the mind has been trained to reach higher level, the physical activity will not cause the mind to be completely distracted and disturbed. Such an individual will be able to maintain certain

integrity of mental calmness. Whereas someone who engages in meditation practice where they physically refrain themselves from activities and stay in solitude but have not been able to successfully train the mind to withdraw from distractions may physically be in a meditative posture but the mind can still be very active and busy with all sorts of distractions going on. That person would not be experiencing a true sense of tranquillity and calmness within themselves. Thus, it is clear which of the two the states are more important.

As mentioned earlier, it would be good for us to spend some time in the formal practice of meditation. Having explained the necessity and importance of the practice of meditation, we can now adopt the meditation posture and spend some time in meditation. The meditative posture involves sitting in an appropriate, relaxed but upright position. In order to make the practice an authentic and appropriate practice of meditation, it requires mental determination. We must feel determined to spend our time, the next few minutes, giving our full attention to the practice.

That means that we begin by very consciously making the mental determination to withdraw ourselves from all distractions. We temporarily leave aside all of our thoughts and don't engage any thought that may arise. We bring our focus inwards and as we bring our focus inwards we need to anchor the mind. We choose our breath as the object to anchor the mind and just focus on that. As it is explained we must try to develop 100% focus on the breath itself. From the very outset we must try to develop a clear and vivid image of the breath and maintain our focus on that. Initially we would find that the mind might get distracted but the main point here is to notice it and to try to constantly bring our focus and attention back to the breath. Engage in the object of focus like this again and again, just remembering that temporarily there is no other agenda except focusing on my breath. That is one's priority and one gives one's full attention to that. That is said to be a good habit to develop. So, for the next few minutes we will engage in this practice. (*Pause for meditation*)

We will find that what we have just attempted, as far as the technique is concerned, is not really difficult, obscure and complicated. It is something that we can do. It is a matter of being able to be really attentive and focused. If we give our heart to it, we are able to do it. One would find this simple technique particularly useful when we are in a very disturbed state of mind. If when we find that, for whatever situation or reason, our mind is in turmoil and very disturbed with many thoughts, if we can spend a few minutes settling ourselves down and just focussing on our breath then the natural consequences will be that the mind will feel tranquil and calm. This is how the technique can definitely be useful.

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

4.2.2.1.2.2.4. Resolving the nature of the path that leads to liberation

4.2.2.1.2.2.4.2. The actual resolution of the nature of the path

4.2.2.1.2.2.4.2.2. The type of path one cultivates to overturn cyclic existence

4.2.2.1.2.2.4.2.2.3. The way to train in ethics

4.2.2.1.2.2.4.2.2.3.2 The shortcomings of not guarding ethics

We will attempt to cover a few points from the subject matter that we are studying. Following on from our last session, the topic we are covering is morality or ethics. As the teaching described earlier quoting from other sutras, there are great benefits in adopting an ethical life or practising morality. In fact the benefit of practising morality now is much greater than having engaged in practising morality in the past, even at the time of Buddha. It would have been relatively easier at that time but now, when the situation is much more grave and difficult, to practice morality is even more beneficial and much more meritorious.

Here the text quotes from the *King of Concentration Sutra*, which reads:

For ten million eons - as many as there are sands in the Ganges,
I served with a pure mind,
Food and drink, umbrellas,
Banners, and possessions of lamps to ten quadrillion buddhas.

So much greater the merit of whoever practices
A single training night and day
At a time when the sublime teachings is perishing
And the Sugata's teaching is coming to an end.

This sutra says that while one may gain extensive merit from making sublime offerings to numerous buddhas, the merit one gains from observing even one aspect of morality is far more meritorious. The Buddha is explaining that in the past he had made extensive offerings to previous buddhas, but the merit for someone who practises even a single training, which means even a single aspect of ethics or morality, in these degenerate times, will gain much greater merit than the merit of having made sublime offerings to the buddhas in the past.

The main point is that we might find it hard to have the opportunity to make great extensive offerings to the Buddha, however observing moral ethics is something that we can manage to do. The quote is saying that when we observe ethics, even a single point of the ethics, the merit that we gain is much more extensive than making such offerings. This should make us feel inspired and encouraged to actually observe ethics.

What one needs take as a personal instruction is that observing ethics is something that is really worthwhile and beneficial for oneself. The sutra says that, 'at the time when the sublime teachings is perishing and the Sugata's teaching is coming to an end' practicing a single training night and day is much more beneficial and one gains

much more merit from that at this particular time. This is referring to the fact that at the time when the Buddha's teaching was flourishing, (at the time of Buddha himself and soon after) it was much easier to engage in the practices of observing ethics because of the positive influence around oneself at that time. But now, in what is called the degenerate times where the teachings of Buddha are declining, there is much less support and the positive influences are not as strong. So this is considered to be a difficult time. At such a time as this if one observes ethics, even a single aspect of ethics, it is really meritorious.

So, we need to feel determined to observe ethics in one's life. One single aspect of moral ethics would mean one of the ten virtues, for example the ethic of avoiding killing. We could make a commitment to avoid killing. At best a commitment to avoid killing for the rest of our life. If one is not able to manage to make such a long term commitment, then it could be for a year or a few months or a few weeks or even for a day. If one makes a commitment that one will definitely avoid killing any living being for one day and one keeps that promise, one is observing the ethics of not killing. Likewise one can commit to not steal, not to engage in sexual misconduct and so forth. We can make a commitment to avoid any of the ten non-virtuous deeds.

When we make the resolution ourselves then, for those who have already taken vows it is a matter of strengthening one's commitment to make sure that one does not breach one's vows. For those who have not taken vows, to internally make a promise such as not to kill for a single day and observing that would be highly beneficial and meritorious.

Some teachers have followed a tradition where the lay vows would be given for one day at a time, so someone could engage in practices for one day or for a week and so forth. There is a tradition where lay people can, for example, take the five precepts for a certain period of time and practice during that time. In our tradition we have the eight precepts called the Mahayana precepts. Those who are so inclined to engage in a practice can take the Mahayana precepts for one day, which would be highly meritorious. One may think, 'what difference would it make just to take some vows for a single day?' But when one actively engages in the practice of taking the precepts for one day that will implant the seed in one's mind and one may be able to observe it again for two days. That will implant a further seed to practise and take the vows for a longer period of time.

It is like any other practice. Observing ethics is also a matter of familiarity with engaging in the practice to whatever extent one feels capable, and slowly extending that. When we think about it, this is really a great practice. When we avoid killing it is directly avoiding harm to other sentient beings. The Buddha taught a practice of non-violence and when we find that the practice involves avoiding killing, stealing, sexual misconduct and so forth there is definitely a great protection against harming others. If one has an intention to harm others it will be hard to make that commitment. However, when one sees the value of non-violence of not

wishing to harm others, it is not difficult to take vows refraining from killing and stealing and so forth. It would be easy because one does not wish to harm others any way. One strengthens that further by making a commitment to actively and voluntarily refrain from specific harm towards others, such as taking other's lives, taking others belongings, engaging in sexual misconduct and so forth. This becomes a practical practice when we think about its value and great benefit. When we relate to the practice of ethics in this way we will find that there is definitely an immediate benefit from engaging in the practice.

We can sum up the attitude of this practice. If in our daily life we can develop the practice that our first thought will be, 'Today, I will not intentionally harm any living being and, as much I can, I will benefit others.' that, in itself, is a highly valuable and meaningful intention that can really help to protect us during the day. Just thinking about that for even a few minutes becomes a highly meaningful practice to start the day. Someone who develops the genuine intention of not wishing to harm any living being and wishing to benefit others will not be inclined to harm someone during the day because of the commitment they made in the morning, and whenever there is a chance to benefit others one will be naturally inclined to do that. The value of such a motivation or attitude in the morning is that the day begins with a positive attitude that can influence one in a positive way throughout the day.

Before we conclude for the evening, we can again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time the object that we focus on is the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. As the mantra is being recited we try to maintain our full attention and focus on that sound and then, when the mantra recitation comes to an end, we remain in that focused state of mind just for a few minutes. That familiarity will be highly positive for oneself.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed from tape by Su Lan Foo
Edit 1 by John Burch
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
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