
The Condensed Lam Rim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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As usual, we will spend some time in meditation sitting upright in a comfortable posture. I regularly say that one of the main purposes of meditation is to subdue the mind to gain control over it. When we think about it, as an individual, we are the ones who rightly need to be in control of our mind and body as the mind and the body belong to us, so rightly we need to be in control. When we refer to my mind, my body it shows that the mind and the body are things the person possesses, so the person should be in control.

However, in most situations it is the other way round where the mind controls us. We seem to have given up or lost our power or ability to control the mind. If you pay attention to this and look within your self and at your life it becomes apparent that we seem to have no real control over ourselves, being at the mercy of whatever thought or whatever fascination our mind throws up. We seem to just follow the thoughts blindly and in that sense we are under the domain or control of the mind.

If we look further and accept the fact that we are controlled by the mind, if the state of mind that is in control is a kind, compassionate and considerate mind then that would be a good thing. A kind mind and attitude would not only be of benefit to us, it would also enable us to be kind and helpful rather than being destructive towards others.

An illustration of being under the control of a good mind would be for example a national leader who was very kind and compassionate. People under their influence would naturally feel good and have general well being because of the leader's kind and compassionate attitude. So, if the person in control is compassionate and good then the people under that influence naturally benefit. But if the leader is influenced by negativity and is harmful, then those under the control of such a leader would suffer the ill effects.

It is exactly the same in our situation: depending on what state of mind we are controlled by, we will experience either pleasant or unpleasant effects. So the main point is that if the mind that controls us is positive then that mind will be beneficial for us. Whereas if the mind that influences us is negative then that influence will be detrimental to our well-being. It is the state of mind that determines our well-being. So when we begin to acknowledge and recognise that it is the state of mind that influences us, we should be aware that whatever activities we do, whatever thoughts we have they exert an influence on us.

We should make the strong decision to not be influenced by negative states of mind such as anger, jealousy, strong attachment or pride. It is quite clear how harmful it is to be influenced by strong anger as it causes us to do all sorts of destructive actions. Strong attachment has the same harmful effect. I emphasise **strong** attachment because in general normal attachment or desire seems to not be as harmful as very strong attachment. Strong attachment where we actually feel pain in our heart, is the kind of attachment that we can see really harms us. The same applies with jealousy

I regularly use the following example: if we prepare and guard our selves against jealousy when we go to gatherings of friends, family or associates we can have quite an enjoyable time. Whereas if we allow ourselves to be influenced by jealousy we start feeling very uncomfortable, resenting how well others may be dressed, how beautiful and fortunate they are. If we experience jealousy then we really feel the anguish and don't feel comfortable at all. So this is really just one example of how a negative state of mind, in this case jealousy, harms and disturbs us.

Jealousy obviously becomes an uncomfortable, unpleasant experience for us, but if we prevent our mind from being influenced by jealousy we can have a pleasant time with others. We really need to protect ourselves from the influence of negative states of mind as it is clear that when we are influenced by jealousy it is we who are actually harmed. We are directly harmed, as we can't enjoy the occasion because our mind is disturbed. Feeling jealous can have a negative influence on others as well. People we are in contact with don't feel comfortable if we are seething with jealousy.

When I've checked with people about how a family or social occasion went, they have often said that it was not particularly good because there was quite a lot of jealous rivalry. So it is obvious that jealousy indirectly affects others as well, via a ripple effect. So if we acknowledge and accept that negative states of mind such as jealousy are detrimental to our own and others well-being, and take the initiative to overcome these negative states of mind this is where the practice of meditation comes in.

Meditation is a technique which helps one to identify negative states of mind in order to eventually get rid of them. However we should not expect quick results. The practice takes time as these negative states of mind are well entrenched in our mind. We should not expect immediate results because that could lead to disappointment but if we slowly and consistently engage in the practice we will begin to notice real transformation taking place. When we experience that gradual transformation we are encouraged to maintain the practice and really take it to heart.

The reason I emphasise meditation as being really useful and beneficial is because the alternative is indeed something less than desirable. The alternative of not meditating, of allowing ourselves to be in a negative state of mind and being influenced by the negative feelings is something we all experience as disturbing to ourselves and others. So we should really employ the technique and apply it in our lives to experience the benefit. It takes

time for us to see, understand and experience the benefit but there is definitely benefit to be gained.

The state of mind free of delusions is apparently a very joyful, blissful state of mind. Now I'm not claiming that I've reached that state myself or have experienced the great joy and bliss mentioned. However it seems that it is definitely possible. I've said before that an example of a geshe who meditates but who has not subdued the mind is myself - Geshe Doga. However I have had a natural affinity with meditation since I was very young. When I was but a young boy, while there was no one to really teach or instruct me on how to meditate, I would attempt to adopt the meditation technique and actually try to bring my mind to focus inward. It may have been just a novelty, trying to impress others; nevertheless I did seem to have the natural inclination of wanting to meditate.

Even though I have made attempts to meditate in my life, subduing the mind does not come about quickly and easily. Another geshe actually once teasingly confronted me saying, 'Apparently you had some familiarity with meditation when you were quite young, so if that is so, can you teach me a meditation technique?'

In response to that I said, 'Well I don't have much to teach but I can just mention one point.' I mentioned to this other geshe that in meditating when one selects the object, it seems to be important not to focus on an external object, but rather one should internalise that object and regard it as one with the mind that is meditating upon it. One should see the object as being inseparable from the mind focusing on the object. This seems to enhance one's meditation.

The geshe's response was that I had seemed to clarify an important point. So, when meditating it is good to imagine the mind that focuses on the object has merged with the object itself. This technique seems to enable one to hold a focused concentration on the object for a longer period.

So now we can actually engage in our meditation practice. Remind yourself what meditation actually means. It means choosing to focus on an object that does not cause any delusions to arise. Having chosen such an object to familiarise yourself with, maintain your attention and focus on it for as long as you can. Consistent familiarity with that object is meditation.

The object we choose for our meditation technique here is our own breath. Focusing on the breath is explained in the teachings as being a very effective technique to settle a very busy, distracted mind. Since we all have busy lives we can assume that our minds are also quite busy and distracted so it seems most appropriate for us to use the breath as an object to focus on as a means to settle our mind.

Adopting an appropriate posture we set a positive mind to engage in the meditation. The physical posture is to sit upright in a relaxed manner. The important point is in a positive state of mind to make the following commitment: 'for the next few minutes, I will not allow my mind to be influenced by any distractions, but intentionally bring my entire focus and attention inward;

I'll then place my attention and focus on my breath'.
(Meditation)

That will be sufficient meditation for now so we might cover a few lines of the text as we seem to be running out of time. It is worthwhile to invest some time in our daily life to engage in the practice of meditation. The main point of meditation is to develop some sense of joy and happiness in the mind, and if one really begins to develop that then other things in our life flourish and develop from this happy state of mind.

Communication with others becomes much more fruitful as we naturally attract friends and companions when we seem happy and contented. We become naturally more appealing to others and they are drawn to us and like to be around us. We need friends and companions to help us in our life. When we acknowledge that we like to have companions and friends we should try to invest in what creates real companions. A happy, contented state of mind is really a main factor in having good relationships. The reason we are more pleasant to be around is because when we are in a happy state of mind we are less irritable, less on edge and more settled.

When we are happy and contented we are less likely to get upset. However we notice that if we are a little unhappy then it's very easy to get upset and angry at the slightest thing that goes wrong. The slightest mishap can throw us off track and we can become annoyed and agitated whereas if we have really focused and worked towards maintaining a pleasant, happy state of mind, then small things going wrong don't really upset us.

And another point is to try to not get upset and angry about past mistakes and events, as the more we dwell on this the more upset we can become. If we can maintain a happy state of mind we can brush aside small things that have gone wrong or have caused irritation and just let bygones be bygones. So maintaining that sort of attitude will prevent us from feeling upset, angry and annoyed. When we are not upset, angry and annoyed we are more naturally appealing to others, they appreciate us more and consequently we gain personal benefit.

We can more easily accomplish the things that we need to do in life with a contented mind than with a disturbed, angry mind. The things that we wish to accomplish become much harder to achieve if we are unhappy and discontented. So we can see that certain states of mind hinder what we want to achieve in life.

4.2.2.1.2. The actual way to take the essence

4.2.2.1.2.3. The way to train the mind in the stages of the path of beings of the great scope

4.2.2.1.2.3.1. The link

4.2.2.1.2.3.1.2. Working for the welfare of others is befitting of the great and thus should be done

In our last session we covered the second subdivision from an earlier category, which is: Working for the Welfare of others is Befitting of the Great and thus should be Done.

So in relation to that outline the text quotes from the Master Chandragomin's *Letter to a Student*:

We had already covered the explanation of the first part of the quote, so the last two lines read:

*Such is the nature of persons of great capacity,
who lack any self-interest;*

*They are consumed with whatever brings
happiness and benefit to the world.*

So the meaning of these lines is that a person of great capacity which is a person who follows the Great Vehicle, is a being who does not have any self-interest. As they lack any selfish motive, whatever activity they engage in is solely for the benefit of others. The main point is that there is no selfishly-motivated-interest in a practitioner of the great scope as they are consumed by whatever brings benefit to the world. They are constantly preoccupied with how their actions or deeds can be of benefit to others.

4.2.2.1.2.3.1.3. Toiling and persevering in order to provide refuge for others from suffering is fitting of a noble man, and scholars

Now we come to the third subdivision under the earlier category: Toiling and persevering in order to provide refuge for others from suffering is fitting of a noble man, and scholars.

As the text explains under this heading, 'One who sees beings tormented by the above mentioned suffering and hastens to act for their welfare is called a person of great capacity, an adept and scholar'.

So as the text explains the individual or noble being who sees other sentient beings tormented by the various types of suffering mentioned earlier, is immediately moved by that suffering, moved by the wish of not wanting them to suffer, and 'hastens to act'. 'Hastens to act' means not leaving it, not being idle and remaining indifferent to others' suffering, but rather taking responsibility and acting.

'Act' also has the implication of acting with joyous effort, applying joyous effort in acting quickly; acting to alleviate or remove the suffering of other sentient beings. So such a person is called a being of great capacity, a noble being, an adept and a great scholar. The description of a noble being, a being of great capacity, committed to following the Great Path, is referred to as a bodhisattva.

We can become inspired by this description of such great beings to be like them. So even though it may be hard for us to practice exactly as they do right now, by being inspired by their great deeds and noble intentions we can try to practise being compassionate and more considerate of those around us.

The great love and compassion a noble being has for all beings is likened to the great concern and love of a mother for her child. The love and concern a mother has for her only child is really, truly intense to the extent where the mother would do anything for her child's welfare.

The description here in the text is of the mother who would quickly respond to the child's needs. If the child is suffering in any way the mother very quickly responds willingly, lovingly, not with a sense of burden but with a really strong wish to help the child. This attitude is

similar to joyous effort, really wanting to help the child and quickly responding to the child's needs.

So similarly, one can use the analogy of motherly love to train in responding to other's needs regardless of who they are. We can begin by wishing to help those close to us such as our partners, parents and friends. We should at least develop the intention of wanting to benefit and help them, as it all begins with intention. We can then act upon the noble intention we develop, and slowly bring about real benefit for others. And when we cultivate those good intentions within us and begin to slowly act upon them, then even on a conventional level, in a worldly sense, anyone who helps others is much appreciated.

As well as in a Buddhist context in a worldly context a person who tends to others' needs, helps and is concerned for them is someone who is appreciated by everyone. Everyone regards such a person as being altruistic and kind because of the goodness that such a person embodies. If we appreciate and acknowledge those who benefit and help others, then it is logical and reasonable that we should try to adopt and develop good intentions ourselves so as to benefit others in whatever way we can. By starting with those around us we can then expand our scope to include more and more beings.

While we may at present lack the ability or capacity to help others on a large scale each and every one of us definitely has the capacity to benefit some beings. At least even if it's only one person, one being, we do have the ability to do that. So it is a matter of really seeing the value of benefitting others, and taking the initiative to actually bring about benefit for others.

There are times when we may feel really compelled to help someone because they are in a disturbed state and there may be times when we lack the ability to completely remove their suffering, but we are moved with an intention or thought of not being able to bear their suffering and wonder, 'What could I possibly do? If there was any possible way that I could actually relieve their suffering I would gladly do so.' So we may have had that experience in relation to another person we see suffering. That is a clear sign that we do have the noble intentions.

Being able to benefit others comes from the intention of wanting to help and be of benefit to them. So as mentioned previously in the text, feeling the urgency to benefit others and thus willingly and joyfully engaging in the act of helping others is the deed of a noble person. So again even though we may not be able to be of assistance on a large scale right now, if we train our mind to benefit those around us, those we deal with in our everyday lives, and those that we are closely associated with, that is the practice for us on an individual level.

In the beginning we start with those we are close to and then we can slowly expand our scope. One of the crucial times when people really need help is when they are sick, so we can take the initiative to pay extra attention and give extra care. If they are in a very distressed situation because of illness or tragedy, then whatever help we provide for them would be really appreciated.

Many people have confided in me that when they were at their lowest, when they were feeling sick or distressed, at that time whoever helped them was really appreciated and they had warm feelings for them. We may not be able to relieve others' physical suffering or pain, but usually they do not expect us to get rid of the pain. Most likely they probably would like some closeness and warmth, someone they can trust and rely on. When one is feeling unhappy and unwell what one needs is someone who can help and be relied upon to bring some comfort and peace.

So being there for them, helping them in whatever way one can is usually really appreciated. The factor that makes us inclined to help others when they are in unpleasant situations such as illness or difficulty, as I mention regularly, is what we call genuine love and compassion. Genuine concern comes from genuine love and compassion for others. So it is essential that we develop a genuine sense of love for our partner and friends, because genuine love and compassion for the other is what will withstand difficult situations.

Whereas if the connection or the relationship with the other is based mainly on attachment then at times of distress and in difficult situations rather than helping, one might be inclined to shy away, to remove oneself from that situation. It may be difficult for a normal relationship to be entirely free from attachment. So, while it might have been attachment that brought you together in the first place and there's still attachment for the other, try to develop a genuine sense of love and compassion for them on top of that attachment. Try to outweigh the attachment towards them with love and compassion because that is, as I mentioned before, when the genuine love and compassion becomes stronger and this will enable us to withstand difficulty and help others when they're in real need.

Whereas if attachment were stronger and love and compassion were minimal then at times of difficulty and distress one will shy away and will not be as motivated to help. So you see this is where I emphasise that in your relationships with others try to develop a genuine sense of love and compassion; when it is developed mutually from either side, this will be of benefit in the long run.

Before we conclude the session for the evening we can spend another few minutes in meditation and this time we use the mantra, the sound of the mantra to be recited as the focal object. The mantra is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra and as we hear the sound of the mantra we try to maintain our entire focus and attention on that and then as the recitation stops we can just stay in that focused state of mind, we just keep our focus on the resonance of the sound and just maintain that focus for a while:

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version*

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