
The Condensed Lam Rim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

25 August 2010

As usual we will spend some time in meditation while sitting in a relaxed upright position.

One of the main purposes of practising meditation is to protect one's mind. We need to protect our qualities of kindness and happiness. I emphasise that a happy and joyous state of mind is absolutely essential for our well-being. So we need to pay the utmost attention to protecting it. I definitely think that one's best companion is a happy mind, an unfailing real companion so it is important that wherever and in whatever situation we find ourselves, we should make sure that we always maintain a happy, contented state of mind.

It can become very difficult to restore a happy, calm state of mind once we lose it. So it is important that we make a concerted effort to maintain a happy and joyful mind at all times.

Even if we have all the good external conditions in terms of comfort, such as the latest plasma TV and so forth, if our mind is not in a happy state, regardless of having possessions we can still feel unsettled. We are then unable to enjoy ourselves even with a lot of material objects. So it goes to show that the main cause of our continued well-being is a happy and contented mind.

When we find ourselves in a situation where regardless of good external conditions we are still not really happy, it is obvious that it is because we have not protected and maintained a good mental attitude. It is then vital for us to understand how we lose our happy state of mind. Because it is such an essential point I talk about it and emphasise it consistently.

How do we lose a happy and joyous state of mind? We need to really understand how this happens and what happens when our mind becomes distracted. Our mind becomes distracted when we focus on an object that causes us distress. When we think about it, it is clear that there are certain things which cause disturbance and agitation to our mind. Through habituation we may not even notice this happening but we fall into the pattern, where we constantly seem to get involved with, or allow ourselves to be obsessed by an object that causes us to feel uncomfortable and anxious.

Initially we are not to blame because we are habituated to these distractions and seemingly have no control over them. Even when we recognise that our mind has this tendency, it may be difficult for us to reverse the situation because it seems we have no control. In fact by the virtue of recognising that, we can begin to apply the technique of focusing inwards choosing an appropriate inner object. At first this may not be easy because we don't have

experience of focusing on an inner object. However when we meditate on an inner object again and again, by making an effort, gradually we will begin to notice that a shift takes place.

If we are able to focus on an inner object our mind is released from the obsession of focusing on particular objects that cause us distress, so we can begin to feel calmer. When we recognise that, and experience it for ourselves, then it is a matter of carefully applying the technique repeatedly. If we continue applying this technique it will become quite natural. It will take less effort to focus inwardly.

When one comes to a point of being able to comfortably focus on an inner object and to maintain that focus, then one will experience a real sense of lasting calmness and joy in one's mind. One will be at ease wherever and in whatever situation one may find oneself in, particularly when alone. There will be no sense of loneliness but rather a sense of real joy and happiness. This according to the textual explanation is called the 'boon of bliss'. It is like getting a 'boon' from being in a blissful of state.

At this point, the well-being of the individual has definitely been secured. It is good for us to relate to the positive consequence and outcome of meditation. In time we will definitely be able to acquire this benefit for ourselves. Otherwise, one who allows their mind to be distracted, isn't really paying attention to their state of mind, and it can seem that there's no end to the forms or aspects of the distraction. At certain times we perpetuate some mental states, thinking how painful it is, imagining a grim future resulting in anxiety and fear that paralyses us and makes us feel helpless.

Someone experiencing this anxiety and obsession is really in a vulnerable state, always feeling on edge, anxious, and uncomfortable. Then there are certain times when we get carried away thinking, "if I do this, I will have this kind of success, I will have that kind of success". The imagined state of everything going well, being just an imagined state, a conceptual distraction going on in the mind often has no real substance or result. Even if one were to achieve a positive result one comes to a point where that does not give real satisfaction, real contentment in the mind. As a result a sense of hopelessness pervades. So therefore whatever we may wish for in a worldly sense, whatever worldly distraction we may indulge in or get carried away with does not bring any real sense of calm and joy in the mind. So this can result in an unsatisfactory state of mind being experienced.

It is only by really looking within oneself through self-analysis that one can recognise one's state of mind. It is definitely possible to reverse our way of thinking so one essential thing to be aware of is that, while external conditions do serve to a certain extent for our physical well-being, what contributes to our mental well-being or inner well-being is really our own positive attitude. External conditions cannot ultimately serve as a means or cause for our inner well-being or mental happiness. The main point being emphasised here is that in order for the positive qualities within one's mind to become a cause for one's inner well-being, one needs to apply the practice of

protecting the mind through meditation. If we fail to recognise that then we are led into states where we might get upset and angry, rather than recognising the cause of one's disturbance as something within our mind.

The actual causes for one's disturbances can be anger but we blame external conditions rather than the cause, which is within us. Despite our regular chaotic state of mind, through habituation we immediately seem to blame and find fault in external causes, conditions and situations. If we sincerely look within, analysing our own state of mind, we will be able to recognise the internal causes. It is a matter of really taking the initiative in applying the technique. If we do apply the technique, if we really do look within ourselves and analyse our internal state, we will be able to recognise the causes of disturbance. This is not out of our reach, or beyond our capacity. It is something we can do as it is a matter of applying the technique.

In summary one needs to be determined to create benefit for oneself, contributing to one's own well-being and in not being self-destructive and obsessive. So be kind and don't harm yourself. As the compassionate Buddha himself mentioned 'one can be one's own enemy' and by the same token 'one can be one's best friend'.

So these very simple words by the kind Buddha are very striking, and have a lot of depth and meaning. These simple words really seem to 'hit the target' so to speak; 'one can be one's enemy' and 'one can be one's best friend'. One can see that there are ways of considering one's own well-being in this life not to mention the benefit of future lives.

We can now actually apply the meditation technique based on what I have said so far. In our regular meditation practice, it would be good to recall the purpose and benefits of meditation prior to engaging in it because that will secure meaningful practice.

So in general it follows that when we decide something based on sound logic with wisdom then we will definitely follow that through whatever action that may be. We do possess intelligence and wisdom.

So, to engage in the meditation practice now we assume a comfortable upright position ensuring that one's mind is completely withdrawn from all external distractions. By withdrawing our attention from distractions and turning our focus one hundred per cent inwards, we remain for a while, and then at a certain point we bring our full attention and focus on the natural rhythmic breathing. Try to maintain this focus on an image of our breath. So in the technique of focusing on the breath we need to try to not hold it too tight because if we have too much of a strained focus it will hinder our meditation practice. On the other hand if our focus is too relaxed then that will also be an obstacle to our meditation so one should find one's own personal level of focus, and then having found that just maintain it for the next few minutes.

(Pause for meditation)

I would like to give an opportunity for people to ask questions. If you have any you can raise your hands. If there aren't any questions we can continue with the text.

Question: What is the difference between the tantric and sutra path?

The explanation of the tantric path comes in more detail later on in the text. It is traditionally inappropriate to explain much about tantra in the beginning of a teaching as the sutra stages should be understood first. One way of presenting the difference is that the sutra path is called the causal path and the tantric path is called the resultant path.

So in relation to the definitions of the sutra and tantra path, the sutra path is referred to mainly in terms of practices and techniques which serve as causes to obtain the Buddhahood or enlightenment. While in the tantric path the practices that are presented are mainly in relation to the resultant state of enlightenment itself. For example, tantric practices involve viewing the surrounding area as a pure land, a blissful enlightened being's land, and viewing oneself as an enlightened being. The practices done in relation to rituals and visualisations also symbolise enlightened activities. These are restricted to tantric practices.

The four resultant purities are the purity of body, purity of possessions, purity of abode and purity of activities. These four purities when practised at the causal level are a unique feature of the tantric path.

The purity of the body is an enlightened body and then the purity of the possessions are the ornaments of the deity. The purity of abode, means the celestial realms, the pure lands of an enlightened being. There are very detailed, meticulous explanations in the teachings of the abodes, also known as the mandalas of the deities.

The activities are the great activities of an enlightened being manifesting in different bodies in order to benefit sentient beings in various ways. So all of these actual purities take place only at the time of the result when one becomes a buddha. However the unique feature of tantra is to incorporate those purities at the time of the cause, meaning to incorporate these practices at the time when we are accumulating the causes to become enlightened. So this is the unique feature of tantra which the sutra path doesn't have. The sutra path mainly emphasises the causes of obtaining enlightenment.

These days tantric texts are available. There are many texts explaining tantra which one can read to get more information if one is really interested and keen.

Earlier in the text when the qualities of the Mahayana path was explained, it applied to the Great Vehicle in general. Whereas when explaining the particular categories of the Mahayana vehicle, the text explains that there is the sutra path and the tantra path. So that is why it appears in the text now even though not much detail of tantra is presented yet.

However what one also needs to understand in relation to the sutra and tantra is that all teachers and scriptures agree that the sutra path serves as a basis or a cause for practising the tantric path. In one of the prayers it says that "By having completely mastered the common path, May I then be able to practise the uncommon path", which refers to the tantric path. For those who have received

initiations or have some interest in tantra you can access some of the material and try to understand it a bit more.

Just as we have the *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* by Lama Tsongkhapa, the very same author Lama Tsong Khapa also composed the *Great Treatise on the Tantric Path*. I have heard that it has been translated into English so you can refer to that. I also understand that Jeffrey Hopkins has done a translation, but I am not sure if he has done the entire translation of the *Great Treatise on the Tantric Path*, but definitely some parts have been translated.

Question: Geshe-la in recent days I have learned that I am required to serve on a jury. As a much younger man I have served on juries. I also served on military tribunals commonly known as court-martials. The jury/tribunal required attention to information concerning a person's guilt or innocence. And my recollection is that in those previous instances the person was found guilty and what's more I agreed with that verdict, thereby the guilty person would experience quite severe punishment. Now I suppose what I am asking is could Geshe-la advise in terms of how to approach the verdict of guilty which condemns the person to severe punishment. And, is there such a phenomena as wrathful compassion?

There seems to be a choice in whether you have to serve on a jury or not.

First of all if the person is guilty, then to agree that they are guilty would not be a lie, it would be the truth. That's one way of looking at it. However as explained in the text earlier, there are times when it is appropriate not to utter the truth if it is going to harm someone. That doesn't mean that one has to lie, but simply to not tell the truth if it is going to cause harm. There are incidences in life where we have to take that into consideration.

The analogy in the text is for example if you see a person who is blind, it is obvious that they are blind, it is the truth that they are blind but just because it is the truth, if one were to say 'hey, you blind person', it could hurt and offend them. So it doesn't serve any purpose to call them blind which may in fact insult them.

The other illustration given in the text is that if you see an animal such as a deer running quickly past you and someone who is hunting the deer comes along and asks you "did you see a deer running by?" instead of answering directly and telling the truth, you can say something like "I saw something else going in that direction", so as not to tell the truth to prevent the animal being harmed by the hunter. These are illustrations given in the text as an example of how to deal with these situations.

However in relation to someone who has breached the law and been found guilty, then it is the moral code, the law of the country that the guilty to be punished. It is not as if one is intentionally causing unfair harm to them. In that sense it could be seen as a fair thing, something that is justified, as justice rendered.

Geshe-la understands that the jury is not the one who finally decides the outcome?

Reply from student: The jury can make recommendations.

Either way you can take whatever measures you feel are appropriate and there is no need to worry about it. It seems that if one could be exempted it might be better. Of course if you had to be in that situation you could try to promote compassion and love but then I don't know if that would be taken seriously.

However on the level of personal practice, we should try to use it as an opportunity to develop a real sense of compassion for the victim. Whether they are guilty or not, and especially if they are guilty, one should develop compassion regardless of what the verdict is. If they are found guilty then they will be punished by law, and will suffer. However the suffering that they experience is none other than the result of their own actions. How pitiful the situation is that an action is created out of ignorance and then the consequences have to be experienced by the same person. We should contemplate that scenario and develop compassion for anyone caught in that condition.

That can also serve as an impetus for strengthening one's own practice of abiding by the law of karma by recognising the consequences others' have to experience. Then when one thinks deeply about how all suffering, every type of suffering is the result of previous negative karma, we should firmly resolve to not create the karma to be in that situation and have to suffer. We should develop a sense of regret for the negative karma we have created in the past and commit ourselves to not create further negative karma and to develop a keen wish or aspiration to engage in virtuous deeds. So that is something that can become a personal practice for us.

Question: What would be an example of wrathful compassion.

Wrathful compassion in fact means very strong compassion. There's no wrath in it, so it is not to be understood in the literal sense that it is compassion mixed with wrath or anger. The terminology is used to indicate intense compassion. So, wrathful compassion is none other than intense compassion. Thus, intense compassion for other living beings is wrathful compassion.

In fact wrathful or intense compassion is the next subject in the text so this will be explained later on in more detail. The means to develop intense compassion as explained further on in the text is the extent to which one relates to the suffering of other sentient beings. The more one brings to light the intense suffering sentient beings experience one then reaches the state of not being able to bear the suffering of other sentient beings, and consequently develops very intense compassion for other sentient beings.

Further on in the text there is an explanation of how in relation to three types of beings one can develop either intense compassion, mediocre compassion, or no compassion at all. The love and compassion that we feel for close friends, loved ones and relatives is intense compassion as we are not able to bear the suffering of these our loved ones and friends. The wish to alleviate their suffering becomes very strong as well. Whereas when one sees a stranger suffering one may have mediocre compassion. One may have some compassion but it's not very intense. Then when it is one's enemy

suffering the opposite may occur, rather than feeling compassion, one may start feeling pleased about their suffering. When seeing an enemy suffer, some people may think 'well deserved, they should have even more suffering'.

Question: Would Mahakala be a manifestation of wrathful compassion?

Mahakala is actually a wrathful manifestation of the Buddha of Compassion Chenrezig, or Avalokiteshvara. It is in that aspect because every aspect of the Buddha is said to be skilful means to exhort others to practise Dharma, to subdue other beings' mind. So that aspect is particularly useful for certain types of beings.

The illustration of compassion expressed in the wrathful form as Mahakala would be similar to a parent showing a stern face or gestures to a child who is about to do something dangerous. The parent puts on this expression in order to stop the child from doing something, which may endanger their life or safety.

One mother told me that when their child starts to misbehave they will sometimes show quite a stern expression but when that doesn't work, then the mother starts crying and the child stops what it is doing. This particular mother said that when she starts crying, desperately not wanting the child to do what they are doing, the child starts taking notice and stops what they are doing goes over and gives the mum a hug.

As a parent it seems that you need to use all means, wrathful, peaceful, skilful. Mainly in summary what it indicates is to use wisdom and compassion together.

Your questions were really very good and I appreciate that. Thank you very much. In showing my appreciation and thanks for the questions I am not implying that I gave very good answers (*laughter*) but I have to acknowledge they were good questions. Since we are a gathering of companions and friends, true friends, Dharma friends, I will not take it personally as an insult if you didn't think that my answer was very good. I just share what I have, and if you don't accept it that's fine too, as I won't take it as an insult.

So before we conclude the session for the evening we can again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time the object of our focus is the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. We just focus on the sound of the mantra and then at the end of the recitation we focus on the resonance of that sound staying in a joyful and calm state of mind. Maintain that calm and focused state of mind for a while and that becomes the practice itself.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed by Ai Chin Khor
Edit 1 by Judy Mayne
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version*

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