
The Condensed Lam Rim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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As usual it would be good to spend some time for meditation. First we adopt a comfortable and relaxed posture. Along with the physical aspect of ourselves there is definitely what we call the 'me', the person that we identify as the individual. There is also what the mind that assists that. Thus we are the combination of the physical body, the mind and the 'I' or 'me'.

If, when the physical body is comfortable and relaxed one then makes sure that the mind is also in a relaxed state, then that state of a comfortable, relaxed body and a relaxed mind will definitely bring about an effect on the person who possesses the body and mind causing them to also feel relaxed. It is essential that we pay attention to this interrelationship between our physical body, mind and ourselves as an individual.

As I regularly explain, in reality the person or the individual is like the 'possessor' of the body and mind. The 'person' is the primary one within the three. It is the primary one in the sense it is the one who possesses the body and mind and therefore the person understandably needs to be in control of the body and mind. This situation is, however, slightly reversed when it seems that our mind controls us.

We seem to be influenced by the mind and under its control. What this points out is that within this three-fold aspect of ourself the mind is really primary. It is really in dependence on the state of our mind that we as an individual experience the effects of either well-being or distress. If the mind is calm and relaxed then, as an individual, we also feel calm and relaxed. If the mind is in turmoil and a chaotic state then, as an individual we also feel disturbed and in a chaotic state. Thus, as the teachings emphasise, our well-being is primarily related to the state our mind. When we see how true that is for oneself, we can see the truth of that statement.

It is precisely because the mind plays such an important role in our existence, and particularly in relation to our well-being, that I regularly emphasise that it is essential to pay attention to the state of our mind. We particularly need to ensure that our mind is in a calm and relaxed state. I also regularly emphasise the need to protect our mind, particularly the joyous and happy state of mind. That is something that we need to protect. It is our most valuable possession. A happy state of mind is the primary condition for our well-being. We will notice that those who have achieved, or have worked towards, maintaining a happy state of mind naturally have a calmness about them that one can feel when you are in their presence. Therefore working towards having a joyous and happy mind, a positive state of mind, is

essential for our well-being. That is why it is worthwhile that we pay attention to this.

I regularly emphasise in my teachings how essential a joyous and happy state of mind is. I share that with you as a means for you to identify the happy and joyous state of mind as one's best companion, an unfailing best friend. As I emphasise this, some people may feel that I am advocating loneliness.

From my personal experience in life I have had to deal with being alone. Having separated from my parents when I was about 17 years old I have never had the opportunity to be with them again. I have had to be independent and look after myself since I left home. So, I have had to spend most of my life taking care of myself.

What I am really trying to emphasise, however, is that if one's state of mind is joyous and happy then that seems to be the real ultimate aid for oneself. In whatever situation one may find oneself, if one is able to maintain a happy and joyous state of mind it seems that things are manageable. One can even get through difficult situations. That shows that the primary source of our well-being is a happy and joyous state of mind. This is something that we will come to notice if we take the time to scrutinise and analyse our state of mind and the source of our well-being. We will come to recognise for ourselves that when we have a happy and joyous state of mind we feel comfortable. We will also recognise that when the mind is in a chaotic state we feel affected in a negative way. When one recognises that a happy and joyous state of mind is the main condition for our well-being, we will develop the initiative to develop and further enhance a happy state of mind.

We do, of course, also rely on our physical health. Our physical health also contributes to our well-being. But while physical conditions and so forth contribute to our well-being, the *primary* source of our well-being is our mind. Initially we may not recognise this. If we have not paid attention to and analysed our mind we may not recognise that this is the case for ourselves. We are not to blame for this, because we are mostly familiar with focusing outward and thinking that the source of one's happiness is somewhere 'out there' in relation to external things. As long as one has been persuaded or influenced by others or oneself into thinking and believing that external conditions are the source of our well-being then, to that extent, our mind becomes distracted. We naturally focus outward. We have never really paid attention to looking inward at oneself and finding the sources of happiness within oneself.

For most of our life so far we have been focusing outward. Focusing outwardly and seeking the causes for happiness and well-being outwardly has obviously not worked for us. We have not found real happiness yet. Understanding this, we come to realise that there must be an alternative means, something else, that contributes to our well-being. When we begin to recognise that then, rather than focusing outwardly all the time and allowing ourselves to be distracted with external excitement, if we pay attention and look within oneself we would begin to notice for ourselves that the main resource for our well-being is within oneself. It is worthwhile spending some

time analysing and bringing our attention and focus within oneself.

When we consider the well-being of ourselves, what it is that we are seeking? It all boils down to happiness. What we wish for is a peaceful and happy state of mind. When we look into what contributes to happiness we find it is good physical conditions and having a clear and bright state of mind. These two are the main sources of our well-being. In relation to our physical well-being, we need to have good health. For our mental well-being, we need to have clear and bright state of mind. Therefore when the physical body is in good and sound health and the mind is in a clear, focused state then the individual that possesses these experiences the positive effect. That is how we achieve our wish for a happy state of being.

What we wish for is happiness and what we don't wish for is any experience of suffering. However if we lead a life where we are contributing to our own suffering and hindering our own happiness, then we are actually the causes for our own lack of well-being and happiness. How pitiful a situation would that be? That would be a pity in relation to one's own individual well-being. Therefore we need to really consider this.

Having mentioned that it is essential that we protect our mind from adverse deeds, negative states of mind, and maintain whatever calmness and peace we have in our mind, this points us towards the importance of meditation. Meditation is a technique that presents the means to protect one's mind. It is a technique of protecting the mind from adverse circumstances while maintaining the happiness within one's mind. So we come to understand the purpose and importance of the practice of meditation.

Having mentioned that, it is also good for us to understand that our mental well-being is very much related to our attitudes. The attitude that one has in one's mind will influence the mind to be in a joyful and happy state or in a negative state. This is not far-fetched and complicated. It is something that we will be able to notice if we pay attention to our own state of mind. We would find from our own experience that a lot of the worries and anxieties that we feel within our mind are related to certain states of mind where we keep our attention on a negative attitude, an attitude of feeling hopeless and so forth. These attitudes keep going around in our mind to weigh us down and make us feel disturbed.

The term used in the teachings is a 'superstitious mind'. This refers to a mind that is really busy with many different thoughts, ideas and speculations. We speculate a lot. All of that speculation that goes on in our mind is really the cause for a disturbed state of mind. If we begin to notice that for ourselves we can actually reverse it. It is possible for us to reverse that and keep our mind settled and not allow it to be going in every direction. We can keep it more anchored and settled. That is something that we are able to do. Maintaining a positive attitude, even in the face of difficulties and so forth, helps our mind to remain in a joyous and happy state. This is something that we will also begin to notice.

In relation to how our well-being is related to our state of our mind, the great meditation master Geshe Karpa said,

'for as long as one doesn't understand the workings of one's own mind, whatever we do, we will not feel settled'. 'One will not feel settled', means not feeling peaceful. Geshe Karpa is indicating that, for as long as we don't understand that our well-being and all of our sufferings are very much related to the state of our minds, and for as long as we believe that our well-being is dependent on external situations, whatever we do we will not feel really settled. The reverse of that situation is that once one recognises that our well-being is related to our state of our mind, then we will find that we have the power or the ability to change our attitudes to being favourable.

The essential point of the advice from the great masters and the teachings is that we need, at all costs, to be wary of being influenced by negative states of mind or what we call the delusions. 'The delusions' is the term for all the various negative states of mind that can cause us to be in a negative state and have negative attitudes. It is essential that we develop a mindfulness of being wary of this and try to recognise a negative mind as soon as it starts to manifest so that we don't give full power or influence to it. Being wary basically means reminding oneself, 'This is a negative state of mind, so be careful.'

This is what I do regularly myself. In my daily life I check my own mind and when I find that a negative tendency arises I tell myself, 'Geshe Doga, be careful. Don't trust this negative state of mind. A negative state of mind will harm you!' I warn myself and that is how I try to combat and overcome the influence of negative states of mind. That is how I engage in the practice in my own daily life. As I find that useful for myself, I encourage you to also be wary of negative states of mind and to try to always be mindful.

It may not be possible to completely overcome negative states of mind or stop delusions arising immediately, i.e. we may not be in the position right now to completely overcome or stop them. However, the mere identification of a negative state of mind manifesting within oneself seems to deflate the intensity of that negative state of mind. Thus the harm it causes is less severe. It is definitely useful to just recognise it. Even to recognise this would be very useful for us.

The way to understand how a negative state of mind influences one and can be destructive is to recognise that when a negative state of mind arises it becomes a motivator. It's compels us to do something and act in a certain way. If we don't recognise a negative state of mind then we fall victim to it and act it out. If we recognise it we can prevent it from propelling us to perform that action.

When one analyses one's own state of mind and begins to recognise the negative state of mind for what it is and also recognises the intensity and power of the negative state of mind, we will understand that even though we recognise that a negative state of mind such as anger is arising, it is hard for us to not be under its influence. Because of the negative state of mind's intensity and power we are sometimes compelled to do things that become destructive. When we recognise that for ourselves, it first of all encourages us to be wary and

mindful and at all costs prevent ourselves being under the influence of a negative state of mind.

Practising mindfulness and wariness and recognising the negative states of mind for what they are also helps us to understand others better. It particularly helps us to understand why others are being negative. When we see others in a negative state we begin to recognise and understand how that is actually a very uncomfortable situation for them. From understanding oneself one begins to understand others.

The great teacher Buddha Shakyamuni has said that the fault does not lie in the living being themselves, but in the negative states of mind, which are the delusions, that they possess. What Buddha Shakyamuni is saying is really true. When we begin to see the truth of that statement there is no choice for us but to feel compassion for others when we see them in a negative state. There is no room for us to feel angry towards them, but instead we feel great compassion for them. That is how we need to understand the Buddha's statement. When we see someone being negative, they are in that state because they are under the influence of the delusions. By nature, the person themselves is not inherently negative or evil. That is the main thing that we need to understand.

In my own case, when I know someone to be very short tempered and easily irritated I can feel even more sympathetic toward them. Rather than being upset and angry with them, because I understand that they are influenced in that way by that negativity, I don't get upset. I don't feel angry towards them. Instead I try to develop even more patience. And rightly so. Because they are under the strong influence of a negative state of mind such as anger, I feel I have to be more patient with them. That comes naturally when one understands that they are under the influence of a negative state of mind that makes them feel uncomfortable, and they are not in a happy state. I feel this is an essential point that we need to consider and think about, because we have to associate with others in our daily life. We are bound to come across people who appear to be negative, judgemental, and so forth. When we do come across others who appear in that way we can develop compassion rather than feeling angry and upset towards them. That is the way to practice.

I have already related incidents from my own life showing how one doesn't have control over oneself when one is under the influence of strong emotions such as anger. When I was a young boy in Tibet I used to get into fights with other young boys. In our fights, when we were under the influence of anger we would get so worked up that blows might even be exchanged or even stones thrown. We would have bleeding wounds. But in that moment you don't feel any pain, and you don't realise that you have been hurt. You don't feel the pain because you are so worked up with that emotion.

However, after the fight is over and you go home you start to feel the aches and pains and realise that you have been hurt. For me that was an experience of how when one is under the control of anger one does not even realise that one has been harmed. Having mentioned the necessity for us to understand the workings of our mind

as a means to protect one's mind, the means and methods for that gaining that understanding is again the practice of meditation.

We can now actually spend some time in formal meditation. In order to do that we again adopt a comfortable physical posture. In order to understand one's own mind the first step is to withdraw our mind from all other distractions. So, temporarily, we let go of all other thoughts, ideas and plans and so forth and just bring one's focus inward. Try not to think of anything else and just focus the mind inward and distance yourselves from all distractions. That is the first step. Having brought the focus inward we place our focus on the object for meditation which is our own breath. We keep our entire focus just on the natural in-flow and out-flow of our breath for the next few minutes and don't allow our mind to be influenced by any other thoughts or distractions. We try to maintain our focus in this way for the next minutes. (*Pause for meditation.*)

If anyone would like to ask question, you can raise your hand.

Question: How does one apply mindfulness when delusions such as anger arise, do we just observe them or do we prevent them from arising altogether?

If one could apply mindfulness that prevents the delusions from arising altogether that would, of course, be ideal. That would, however, perhaps be too good to be true for beginners. So the next best option if it is not possible to prevent a delusion from arising altogether is to recognise it for what it is. Recognising it implies recognising the disadvantages of giving in to that negative state of mind such as anger. If the disadvantages or ill effects of anger dawn upon us then we are less likely to give into anger and express it.

In order to clearly recognise the disadvantages of anger it is sometimes said to be useful to actually invoke anger in oneself. 'Invoke' means imagining becoming very angry at an object or person. One goes through the process mentally, 'OK, so I get very angry. What is it that I am likely do? In my intense anger now, what is it that I might do to this person or object?' When one begins to see where it would lead one. it could be a wakeup call for one to realise what happens if one were to act out the anger, especially moments of very intense anger. If one does not give into intense anger one may not entirely see its ill effects. That is the point. In order to see the ill effects of anger one imagines oneself getting extremely angry. If the object was a person, what is it that we would say or do to that person in that intense moment of anger? Then one will clearly see the grave, negative consequences. When one sees the negative consequences it will naturally reduce anger within oneself. That is one of the ways to be able to deal with it.

When one conjures up intense anger in one's mind and mentally carries it all the way through to the consequences of acting upon this intense anger, then one would reach a point where one would start to become afraid and dread the prospect of carrying out those actions. One would actually start to feel afraid of it. That is how one can become more submissive or calmer through this process.

Question: It seems that when we have a lot of choices, it can cause anxiety in the mind. For example when going into the supermarket, it is hard to know what to choose because there are too many things!

With a lot of choices, anger might arise when one cannot afford to get the best choice. (*Lots of laughter*) If one had the means to get whatever seemed to be the best product I suppose one would not get angry. Not handling the situation may arise where one feels one cannot provide whatever one sees as best. That might cause anger to arise. Someone who lives with a partner might start getting upset with a partner who cannot buy certain things. If they cannot purchase it themselves they might start hinting or saying, 'I need this product. Why can't I get it?'

The practical way to approach this is to check one's mind and see what is it that one really needs. One can just give in to whatever speculation or neurotic state of mind that affects us. But if we look around, there are others that seemingly are not irritated by that. They go by and pick up what they want. Those who like tea just get a teabag. If they don't drink coffee, they won't pick up coffee. They won't even look at it. It doesn't bother them. They just carry on and get the next product. Maybe one could learn from that and think, 'Well, do I need coffee? Is it good for my health? Maybe I don't need to drink coffee. Maybe it's OK to just drink tea.' If one is happy with tea, one just picks up tea. If one needs both, then have some tea and some coffee. (*laughter*)

But ultimately we have to look into our own situation at what is good for us. If we have to make a choice I regularly emphasise that it is better to get something that is good for our health, rather than just going for the taste of it. Often we might go for the taste of something but it is actually detrimental to our health. That's not really useful for us. Instead maybe we should sacrifice the taste in order to get something that is better for our health. That is much more worthwhile. That would be using the choice in a constructive way.

Often we choose what seems to be the tasty but might be harmful for us. We need to consider how long the taste lasts. Once it goes past our tongue it just changes into a substance that isn't that pleasant anyway. It doesn't make much difference after it goes past our mouth. What we call a good taste is actually limited to the duration that it's in our mouth, particularly on our tongue. If we investigate further as to where we actually experience the taste on our tongue, we find it's not the whole of the tongue but only some part of the tongue that experiences the taste. In the scheme of things, the pleasure is temporary and limited to only one aspect of ourselves. But it could affect us in a grave way. That is something that it would be worthwhile to consider in this way.

The main point is that one needs to use one's intelligence in finding out and really scrutinising what is really useful and essential for oneself. One then makes choices based on that intelligence or wisdom that we have. Otherwise, if we start getting something just because we fancy it we might end up with many things that are not useful. For example, perhaps you might have also heard of the wife of the president of the Philippines who had 4000 pairs of

expensive shoes. The reality is that she has only two feet! (*Lots of laughter*)

We can take that instance as an illustration. Apparently the cost of these 4000 pairs of shoes would have bought shoes for 8000 ordinary people. When we think about that situation and the reality of possessing that many pairs of shoes how practical is it? How many would she wear? Besides this notion, 'I have these shoes' what practical way can it be useful for her? If the cost of those shoes was distributed for others' well-being many poor people could be helped. If someone with intelligence reasons that out it would seem much more worthwhile to spend that money to benefit others rather than on something that doesn't have much use. Those with intelligence and wisdom would choose to use the money in that more practical way. These are the sort of illustrations where we can see that if choices are not made well our money just goes on very trivial things.

If we have intelligence we'll be able to make the right choices. Applying that intelligence requires one to have some discipline. That discipline then is something that we have to adopt. In that way we can lead the right way of life.

We can conclude the session for this evening. However before we finish we can spend a few more minutes in meditation. Thanks for the questions. Those were good questions. Of course, if we had to make a choice the first one seemed to be better (*laughter*). The second question might have been a very frank, personal question because it's from an old friend.

In terms of the depth and profundity of the questions, I would have to be honest and say the first question was deeper and more profound (*laughter*). The second question was a bit uncertain.

The point to be emphasised is that if we allow ourselves to be in self-doubt it is hard for us to make up our mind about anything. But if we apply our intelligence and wisdom we get more direction in our life to make the right choices. That is what we need to really learn from that.

Before ending the session we'll send a few more minutes in meditation. This time we can focus on the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. We maintain our focus on the sound of the mantra while it's being recited. When the recitation ceases we try to maintain our focus, just for a while, on the residue of the sound itself. In that way this becomes an appropriate meditation.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version*

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