
The Condensed Lam Rim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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27 October 2010

As usual we shall spend some time in meditation. It's good to recollect that the purpose of meditation is a means to gain genuine peace, clarity and mental brightness. Meditation helps one manage the mind, which is completely distracted and overwhelmed by worldly pursuits. This is the purpose of meditation. It is a tool to restore a happy, pleasant state of mind in the event that our happiness and contentment may be declining.

It is really essential to pay attention to how we can lose our joy and happiness, which can then cause great loss in our selves. We notice that problems come to the surface once the joyous and happy state of mind starts to decline. So as I regularly mention in my talks, the sense of joy and happiness is considered an inner jewel, something very, very precious, and because it is so precious we should develop a sense of fear of losing it and always be diligent and cautious so that we don't lose that inner jewel of joy and happiness within one's self. When we really consider what it is we're striving for and wish for, our goals, it boils down to the fact that we are all seeking happiness.

The happiness we are talking about here as being the inner jewel is a state of mind in contrast to the idea of external happiness. Really the inner happiness of the mind is what we work towards. Whatever we do, whatever pursuit or attempt we make to develop or gain that inner sense of happiness becomes a very meaningful activity as it brings a sense of worth to our life.

So engaging in the method and techniques becomes meaningful, and worthwhile. In fact the genuine pursuit of happiness itself brings about a sense of fulfilment. In contrast to that, some people have confided in me personally, when they seem to lose their sense of direction they seem to lose touch with the ultimate goal, which is inner happiness, and whatever they do seems to be worthless, empty and pointless. One may reach a very awkward, strange state of being aimless without really any purpose or direction in life, which is quite a sad state to be in.

When we lose a sense of direction in life, feeling a sense of hopelessness or aimlessness we reach a state where there is no real sense of fulfilment or contentment. The factors that lead to being in that state are basically allowing one's mind to be completely carried away and distracted. Following the distractions of a deluded state of mind and being distracted is what leads one to a state of being overwhelmed. One recognises that the cause of losing that sense of inner joy and happiness, losing one's sense of direction, is because one is completely overwhelmed with different disturbing and meaningless thoughts, which contribute to the loss of the sense of joy and happiness. The main cause is really the distractions, following the distractions and allowing oneself to be influenced by the distractions.

So to reverse that situation one needs to apply the appropriate technique of slowly withdrawing from all the distractions and bringing focus and attention inward rather than allowing attention and focus to be dispersed externally in all directions. Bring the mind inward first of all and place it on an inner object. As we familiarise and train our mind, because the technique involves withdrawing our mind from the distractions, the mind will naturally start to feel a sense of ease, a real sense of joy and calmness within oneself. This is the definite positive effect of this technique.

Therefore it is worthwhile that we consider the great benefit of applying this technique of meditation, focusing inward. The benefit is when one begins to really see that one's mind is more relaxed, more spacious, clear and bright then one will experience a sense of joy and well-being, true well-being and contentment within oneself. This result does not happen after only a few attempts as it is a gradual process that takes time. But if we do apply the technique, slowly, consistently we will definitely experience the positive results mentioned earlier. So it is definitely worthwhile to apply this technique in our daily lives.

We definitely need this training for our well-being and we will benefit from it, as what I'm attempting to share with you is not just some casual technique which is useful just once but rather it is something that I believe is of life long benefit. So what I'm sharing with you now is in contrast to the natural tendencies we have when we are still quite young when we allow ourselves to follow the distractions. The temporary positive effect or pleasure we feel doesn't seem to really last through to old age.

In my youth I was a bit robust and considered by my peers then to be a bit brave, as I also got into some fights with others. However from that sort of upbringing and attitude when I was young a transformation took place when I first went from my home town, which was in Eastern Tibet, to Lhasa in central Tibet and Sera Monastery. When I first came to Lhasa I spent nine years studying in the monastery and from then I had to escape to India where I resumed my studies.

When I was studying in Sera Monastery in Tibet the physical conditions were not very comfortable. There was a lack of food, and because I left my home town going a bit against my parents' wishes for me to be near them instead of studying far away in a bigger monastery, I didn't get many provisions from my home-town. So the situation in relation to food and general necessities was harsh and not easy.

Then there was even more hardship and difficulty in my escape to India where I arrived as a refugee, where there were more physical hardships. However, my feeling and attitude was always to try to continue my studies, to do whatever I could in study and practice a little meditation. I wouldn't say much, however I made some attempt at meditation.

Many years after I had left my home town, friends who knew me when I was young, and who met me later in India apparently made comments about me saying, 'It is quite amazing that a robust and rowdy person like Doga can turn out to become so calm'. The main point is that in all of the time through my studies and the physical hardship and so forth, what helped me through all this was the sense of joy and happiness that I had in my mind. Despite the hardships, the difficulties, it hadn't occurred to me that I should withdraw from and abandon my studies.

Even though I don't claim to have really practised much, in whatever level of practice I attempted I tried to be consistent and maintain it. Despite the physical hardships I seem to have been able to carry on and the sense of joy and happiness in the mind seems to have increased rather than decrease. I attribute it to not losing but to maintaining that sense of joy and happiness in my mind. I can confidently share with you from my own experience that when one maintains a sense of joy and happiness, it seems possible to really go through any type of difficulty or hardship, and really endure it.

So based on what little experience I have from my own life I can share confidently with you that a sense of happiness, a happy and a joyous state of mind is really what contributes to one's well-being. That is why I reiterate to everyone regularly in my talks and in my teachings that the essential element to our well-being is a sense of happiness, a sense of joy. There is a mental state that enhances and protects whatever sense of joy and happiness one has in one's mind, an inner quality or positive state of mind that contributes to that and not external matters such as wealth and money and so forth. Even though money and wealth do contribute to our well-being they are not the most essential things for happiness. They are not the main factors that contribute to our happiness and well-being but rather the inner qualities, the positive states of mind and attitudes within oneself is what really contributes to our real well-being. This is what I would like to emphasise.

The reason that I keep emphasising this point is because I sometimes feel that there are those that seem to lack a sense of happiness and joy within themselves or seem to neglect that, and then wonder why they're having problems in life. If one cannot make the connection of understanding that it is the sense of joy and happiness in one's mind that contributes to one's overall well-being then it may seem that one goes round in circles not knowing what's wrong.

From my own experience I want to confidently share that that sense of joy and happiness is what really contributes to our well-being. Here again we come to the importance of the practice of meditation because meditation is none other than a technique that helps to cultivate positive attitudes. A positive attitude can boil down to a state of genuine concern, of kindness in one's mind, of having a kind attitude that is one of the most essential personal qualities. We can cultivate and generate kindness within our selves through the practice of meditation, being mindful of one's thoughts, one's actions. Spending some time and energy trying to adopt that in one's life is what is going to be most useful and indeed absolutely essential for oneself.

So now we come to the actual practice of meditation for a few minutes, where we adopt a relaxed and comfortable physical posture. Then as we adopt the appropriate relaxed and upright sitting posture, it is also important to pay attention to the state of our mind by resolving that for the next few minutes I won't allow my mind to be influenced by the afflictive distractions, which means the distractions related to the negative states of mind. So to withdraw from that means to intentionally not allow one's mind to be drawn to distractions but rather to bring one's entire focus and attention within, first of all to bring it within oneself. Having brought one's entire attention and focus within we now place it upon the object to focus on in our meditation, on our breath. So now we bring our full attention, one hundred percent focus on our breath, try not to think of anything else and be completely mindful of our breath. As

we breathe in and out naturally just keep our full attention on the breath itself. So in this way we will spend the next few minutes just observing that natural breath. *[pause for meditation]*

That will be sufficient for now. Just as we have attempted to do so now, it would be really useful to adopt a regular daily practice of meditation. The advice is generally to have short sessions. You can have a few sessions during the day, but keep them short, and you will not have the excuse that you don't have time. *[laughter all around]*

I am saying this because when I mention the benefits of the practice of meditation people would often say, 'Well, that sounds good but I don't have time for it.'

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

4.2.2.1.2.3.2. The actual paths

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2. How to develop an awakening mind

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1. The stages of training the awakening mind

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1. Training the mind in the pith instructions on the six causes and effect, which comes from the lineage traced to the great master Atisha.

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.1. Brief explanation

In our last session we covered the eighth subdivision from an earlier category which was: The illogic of cultivating minor subsidiary meditations when one is not meditating primarily on bodhicitta.

Under this heading it was explained that if the wisdom realising emptiness does not serve as the main contributing factor for achieving enlightenment, then other minor meditation practices or realisations would not serve either as a means to achieve enlightenment.

Now we come to a second category explaining the subject matter titled: *how to develop an awakening mind*. This is subdivided into three further categories: *the stages of training in bodhicitta, or the awakening mind; the measure of having developed that mind; and the rite or ritual by which one embraces the awakening mind*.

The first, which is the stages of training the awakening mind, is subdivided into two different methods. The first is: *training the mind in the pith instructions on the six causes and effect, which comes from the lineage traced to the great master Atisha*. The second is: *training in dependence upon the text of the great master Shantideva*.

The first is explained under two headings, which are: a *brief explanation*, and an *extensive explanation*.

Under the first subheading the sequence of the six causes of developing bodhicitta is presented, which is also known as 'the seven-fold cause and effect method'. The text first presents the reverse sequence which is that buddhahood arises from the awaking mind; so buddhahood is dependent on developing the awakening mind. The awaking mind is dependent on the whole-hearted resolve, which arises from compassion. And compassion arises from love. Love arises from the wish to repay one's mother's kindness. The wish to repay the kindness of one's mothers arises from remembering the kindness of our mother. And the recollection of the kindness of our mother arises from recognising all beings as having been one's mother. This is how the seven fold cause and effect is explained.

The sequence explained in the text is the sequence where the effect is explained first and then the causes arising from the

earlier causes. Now to list them from the first which goes down to the effect in reverse: first of all 1) one recognises all beings as having been one's mother; and then 2) one remembers the kindness of one's mothers, from that 3) one wishes to repay the kindness of one's mothers; and then 4) one develops great love towards all mother sentient beings, which is called heart-warming or appealing love, then 5) great compassion; and from that arises the 6) whole-hearted resolve to remove the suffering of all mother living beings; and then one develops 7) bodhicitta.

This sequence comes from the lineage of the great master Atisha. It would be good to try to get an understanding of the seven-fold cause and effect sequence.

That is the brief explanation, where the list of the seven-fold cause and effect are presented.

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2. Extensive explanation

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.1.1. Developing certainty in the stages

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.1.1. Showing compassion to be the root of the Mahayana path

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.1.1.1. The importance of compassion in the beginning

Now the extensive explanation is explained in two main subdivisions: *developing certainty in the stages*; and *the actual training in the stages*. The first, which is developing certainty in the stages, is explained in two main categories which are: *showing compassion to be the root of the Mahayana path*; and the second is *the way the other causes and effects are the cause and effect of compassion*.

Showing that compassion is the root of the Mahayana or 'Great Vehicle' path is presented in three main headings: *the importance of compassion in the beginning*; *the importance of compassion in the middle*; and *the importance of compassion at the end*.

This presentation shows why compassion is considered the most important attitude or state of mind to train in the Great Vehicle. As presented in the heading itself, compassion is most essential in the very beginning when one begins to practice on the path. And as one is training and developing one's mind, throughout the middle stage, compassion is important. And at the very end, even when one obtains the ultimate goal, even then compassion is important.

Take note that when compassion is mentioned, it refers to *great* compassion, as opposed to just general compassion. There is a distinction between great compassion and general compassion. On a practical level it emphasises the importance in all stages of one's practice that the Buddhist path is based on non-violence. It is widely accepted that Buddhism is based on non-violence. Compassion must be developed on the basis of, first of all, refraining from harming sentient beings, or of having harmful intent towards them.

The Buddhist path is based on non-violence. An attitude of non-violence on a practical level is really most essential in one's life. Maintaining one's good relationship with others and a real sense of companionship is all based on a sense of non-violence. In terms of the ethics of non-violence, one cannot underestimate the great value of non-violence. If one adopts an attitude of non-violence and voluntarily refrains from harming others, that state of mind itself is what is called moral ethics. And there is extreme, great meritorious value and virtue in adopting the state of mind that refrains voluntarily, intentionally, from harming other beings.

So on a practical level, as I emphasis regularly, it is really important that we adopt this attitude and practice. Not wishing to harm others as in fact, there is nothing to gain in harming others. There is no real benefit for oneself, let alone any benefit for others. The resolve of not harming others needs to be applied particularly to those one is close to, such as one's partner and one's friends. One definitely needs to adopt this attitude because we need friends and companionship. But if there is a sense of wishing to harm them, then true companionship cannot develop. One needs to be mindful of this. Also, when one refrains from wishing to harm others, then a sense of genuine care, concern, love and compassion will develop for them based on wishing to refrain from harming them, then a genuine attitude of caring will follow.

Genuine love and compassion for one's partner sustains the relationship even if attachment seems to be waning. If one's relationship is based on a genuine sense of concern and love for each other then in the event that attachment begins to decline, genuine concern and compassion for each other will not decline. In fact in some cases it seems to increase. Some people I have spoken to confirm this saying that even after their relationship which was based on attachment broke down the sense of caring and concern for each other became even stronger. [*Geshe-la laughs*] At that level the relationship became even stronger than before and they have said that they are happier and their relationship is better than ever. Some say 'my good friend now', not 'partner', but 'a good friend'.

People in relationships can remain good friends despite attachment declining. Through genuine concern for each other they become good friends, with a sense of real openness towards each other. It is my observation and understanding that a relationship based mainly on attachment seems to be a somewhat complicated relationship, at times a bit difficult and oppressive. Rather than being a relaxed and open relationship, it seems to be a little bit restrictive. When attachment is gone and a genuine sense of concern and compassion replaces it, then a sense of openness and freedom develops. So there seems to be a difference depending upon the basis of the relationship.

In light of this it is worthwhile to reflect upon one's qualities of love and compassion because it is good to acknowledge and be joyful about the fact that one has the basis of this great virtue. First of all acknowledge what one has and try to cultivate and develop it further. This attitude can be really useful and inspiring.

Before we conclude the session, we can spend a few minutes in meditation. This time the object of our meditation is the sound of the mantra, Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. As we hear the sound of the mantra being chanted, try to just maintain focus on the sound completely immersing one's self in the sound. And then when the recitation stops, try to abide in the resonance of that sound for a while. And in that way we will end the session. That is the complete meditation.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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