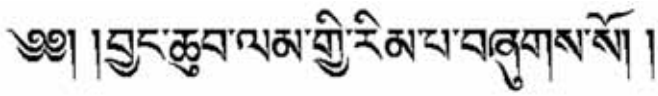

The Condensed Lam Rim



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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As usual it would be good to spend some time in meditation.

As I regularly explain, the purpose of meditation is to protect the mind. What is it that we need to protect in our mind? As I have mentioned previously, we need to protect a state of mind that is clear, bright, and happy.

We really need to consider this point well. As I emphasise regularly, the combination of a clear, bright state of mind and a happy, joyful mind is a really precious possession, which I call the 'inner jewel'. That is why we need to really pay attention to this point, as it would be a great personal loss if we were to lose these qualities of our mind.

Without a joyful, happy mind complemented with kindness, there will be no sense of well-being, as even sufficient external material things do not really contribute to a genuine sense of well-being. If we look around we can see that this is a fact—many people have found that despite having all the desired material things, there's no sense of well-being, and that is because there's no inner sense of a joyful, happy mind complemented with kindness.

What are the means of protecting one's mind? We protect our mind by withdrawing it from distractions, and not allowing it to be influenced them. When we look within, it will be quite clear that as soon as certain ways of thinking or certain kinds of attitudes arise, we immediately feel uncomfortable and a bit agitated, whereas as soon as other kinds of attitudes and ways of thinking develop in our mind, we feel very calm and peaceful. When we begin to notice that, then we realise that we need to overcome those attitudes or ways of thinking that make us uncomfortable as soon as they arise, and we need to adopt those thoughts and attitudes that make us feel calm and peaceful.

It seems as if these positive and negative attitudes are taking it in turns to dominating our state of mind. Just like a set of scales, sometimes the positive mind gets the upper hand and at other times the negative attitudes—those that make us feel uncomfortable and disturbed—take the upper hand. So basically our life is constantly a balance between the influences of these states of mind.

When we investigate our own state of mind and our own experiences, we will come to see that the more we become familiar with the positive states of mind and attitudes, the more they bring us a sense of joy and happiness and well-being within ourselves. Whereas the more we familiarise and acquaint ourselves with the

negative states of mind, the more it makes us feel uncomfortable and disturbed. That becomes quite clear.

There may be a doubt that people who seem happy and joyful don't need to meditate, and that it is only those who are unhappy who need to meditate. And if meditation is a means to protect the sense of joy and happiness, then how does meditation help if one is already unhappy to begin with? Can meditation be useful if one is already happy? It is really worthwhile to think about this.

One point we need to consider is that when an unhappy state of mind prevails, it is replacing an earlier joyful and happy state of mind. An unhappy state of mind can only prevail when an earlier happy state of mind is lessened. The point here is that we already have the potential to enjoy a joyful and happy state mind. And when we are feeling unhappy, that unhappy state of mind is replacing that formerly happy state of mind. So the question is: can that joyful and happy state of mind be restored when it has declined? My answer is it can definitely be restored.

We need to consider how that unhappy and disturbed state of mind arose. It is temporary distractions and disturbances that suppress the joyful, happy mind, and replace it with an unhappy state of mind.

If we take the example of someone who is in an unhappy state of mind, feeling a little bit down and depressed, we need to look into how they arrived at that state of mind. What is actually taking place is that the negative attitudes—in whatever form or aspect they arise—influence the mind to the point where we give our total focus and energy to that negative state of mind. It is as if the negative state of mind temporarily has control over us. We, of course, allow ourselves to be influenced by that state of mind. But how? It is because we constantly allow ourselves to be preoccupied with whatever concern is present. It may be some difficult situation in life, or some tragedy; whatever it may be, when we completely give in to that despair and allow our mind to be influenced by that despair, then the more we become preoccupied with it, the more we feel down and depressed. Then one may reach a state where it seems that there is no capacity to feel joy and happiness any more.

What we need to understand is that unhappiness is only a decline of a previously happy and joyful state of mind as a result of some problematic incident or situation. When we begin to understand how coming to this point is the result of allowing ourselves to be influenced by negative states of mind such as despair and sadness, and that the more we give into that, the more it escalates and the more we become depressed, then we can begin to slowly reverse that situation. By recognising that unhappiness is just a state of mind, we realise that we can withdraw the mind from our preoccupation with our unhappiness. We can strengthen our mind a little bit more and then eventually we will feel stronger, a bit more joyful, and a bit happier. Slowly these feelings can increase and that is how the mind can be restored to a more relaxed, joyful and happy state again.

The way to slowly free our minds of the grip of despair and depression is through the practice of meditation, which will help one to slowly let go of that negative,

doom-and-gloom state of mind. How? The technique of meditation is to choose to focus on an object that does not cause despair or negativity in the mind. An appropriate object is one that uplifts the mind. Thus by focusing on this object, and completely withdrawing from all distractions and the situation causing the despair or unhappy memories, we immediately create some distance from that state of mind of despair and depression.

The more we focus on that object of meditation, and the more familiar we become with it, the more the mind will be naturally uplifted. Then one begins to feel a sense of joy and happiness again. So we can see how, for someone who is in a very unhappy state of mind, or despair, or depression, the meditation technique can be extremely beneficial and helpful, as it uplifts the mind. Then we can see how meditation is so beneficial for anyone who is unhappy.

To answer the earlier question about whether meditation is relevant for someone who is already happy and joyful, the answer is that the ultimate purpose of meditation is to subdue the mind to the point where it is completely free from *all* forms of delusions and negativities, even at the most subtle levels. Although one can be happy and joyful, if it is a worldly happiness then it is only a temporary state and there is no guarantee that will last for long. Meditation practice is the means to protect a genuinely happy and joyful state of mind, and therefore it is very relevant and beneficial for all. So whether one is happy or sad, meditation is an essential technique in life.

There are people who have told me how the meditation technique has definitely benefited their lives. They say that in the past they were influenced by very negative states of mind; in particular having a lot of anger issues. By applying the meditation technique over a long period of time, they have found that it to be extremely effective in helping their mind to become more peaceful and calm, and not influenced by that negative mind of anger. These people are talking, of course, from their own experience. They attest to the fact that the practice of meditation is most beneficial in their life, making them joyful and happy, with a sense of having a happy and meaningful life. But if they don't engage in meditation they feel uncomfortable, down and depressed. These people have no reason to make up these stories. They are talking from their own experience and have benefited from meditation practice. Therefore there are definite benefits when one takes the practice seriously and actually applies it in one's life.

A depressed sad state of mind is due the prolonged influence of a negative state of mind. However, through the practice of meditation one can definitely come out of that state of mind, and be uplifted again. The main point that I am emphasising is that in either situation—whether one is depressed or sad, or in a happy and joyful state of mind—it is essential to apply the meditation practice regularly in one's life. It is an essential tool for overall well-being. Of course, when things seem to be going relatively well, we may not see the relevance of meditation. And even if we have some minor problems, which are not really all that severe, we still might not see

the relevance of meditation. But those who have had problems and difficulties in life and who have actually applied the meditation technique have found it to be extremely beneficial. So it is good for the rest of us to apply the meditation technique for our well-being in general.

As pointed out earlier, one of the main purposes of meditation is to protect a kind and happy mind. If we do that then the immediate beneficiary is oneself. So it is a great advantage to maintain a kind attitude and a happy state of mind. With a genuine sense of well-being, we can exhibit good behaviour in relation to others—we will use good gestures, speak well and show good attitudes, and then we will be respected because of our kind speech, actions, and attitudes towards others.

In contrast, when one has a negative state of mind, a lack of kindness, a lack of joy or an unhappy mind, then that contributes to negative behaviours and gestures towards others. Then people naturally will not like us and would want to keep their distance, and it will be hard to maintain a good relationship with others. Therefore, a kind and happy mind is also one of the ultimate means to maintain good, trustworthy companions and friends. Such a mind really has an overall benefit.

When we really consider the disadvantages of not practising meditation and set this against the advantages of meditation, we can clearly see what is most beneficial for ourselves. This would be really good way to see the relevance of meditation.

In order to begin to apply the meditation technique this evening, we first adopt a relaxed posture. Then we need to choose an object to focus on in the meditation—for now we focus on our own breath.

First we can consider 'Who is meditating here?' Of course, it is our physical aspect, our body, which is here sitting on the cushion. We cannot deny the fact that we are here in the meditation place. So having all those conditions in place, we then need to really pay attention to our thought patterns and state of mind. If the mind remains distracted and starts wandering off, then although the physical body, the person, and the meditation object are all present, we will not be able to apply the meditation technique effectively. Thus we need to pay attention to our state of mind.

When need to make the commitment to actually *place* the focus of our mind on the object—which is our breath—then through that combination of the relaxed posture, and the mind being focused on the object, we will experience the real benefit of the meditation. Thus to make our time most worthwhile and insure our practice to be a *real* practice, we need to be mindful of really making that commitment of actually placing the mind on the object.

Being aware of these factors, we bring our full attention and focus upon the breath. First of all we withdraw our mind from all other forms distraction—whether they are external distractions or internal thoughts—and bring it completely inward. Then we focus on the breath itself, and place our mind upon the breath for the next few minutes. In this way we will spend the next few minutes

in focused meditation. (*Pause for meditation*) That will be sufficient for now.

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

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2. Extensive explanation

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.1. Developing certainty in the stages

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.1.2. The way the other causes and effects are the causes and effects of compassion

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.1.2.1. The way that the reflection from knowing all sentient beings to have been one's mother, up to and including loving kindness act as a cause of compassion

We have come to the second subdivision from an earlier category, which is 'The way the other causes and effects are the causes and effects of compassion'. This is further subdivided into two: 'The way that the reflection from knowing all sentient beings to have been one's mother, up to and including loving kindness act as a cause of compassion', and 'The way in which the highest intention and the awakening mind are effects of compassion'. The first of these is subdivided into five.

The point that is being explained here is how to develop compassion. We all have the capacity to do this, to a greater or lesser degree. But the question is: how do we actually develop that compassion for all beings to the greatest extent? That is the main point that is being emphasised here.

As the text reads

In general if you repeatedly consider the sufferings of living beings, you of course develop the desire to free them from suffering.

When one thinks about the suffering of other sentient beings in general, and constantly contemplates their suffering, one will develop a wish to free them from that suffering.

The text continues:

However, to develop this attitude easily, strongly and firmly...

While compassion may develop when one focuses on the suffering of other sentient beings, the text explains that we need the means to be able to develop this attitude easily, spontaneously, strongly and firmly so that it becomes stable within our mind. To return to the text:

...you must first cherish these beings and have affection for them.

One should cherish those for whom one feels compassion and have a strong genuine affection towards. That is the way to develop a spontaneous, strong and firm compassion constantly.

Finally, the text says:

For at present, you cannot bear for your friends to suffer, you are pleased with your enemies' suffering, and you are indifferent to the suffering of persons towards whom you have neutral feelings, who are neither enemies nor friends.

The second subdivision is 'The difference between seeing and not seeing enemies, loved ones and strangers as appealing'. This relates to how attitudes in relation to these three types of beings—friend, enemy and neutral—actually develop.

As the text explains:

You have the first attitude because you are fond of your friends.

The first attitude is not being able to bear having your friends suffer, which arises because you are fond of your friends. What is being explained here is that being fond of your friends does not relate to whether they are attractive or not. Rather your friendship is on the basis that you consider them your friends and you have a liking for them, and for that reason you can not bear to see them suffering. Even though the text in the English translation uses the word 'friends' the Tibetan word '*nyen*' actually has the connotation of relatives or relations. The text further reads:

Commensurate with your cherishing of them, you cannot bear for them to suffer.

Thus, the more one cherishes one's relatives or friends, the more one cannot bear the suffering that they experience. As the text further explains:

When you cherish relatives or friends to a small or medium degree, you are only able to bear their suffering slightly. When you cherish relatives a great deal, you clearly cannot bear for them to suffer at all. Even if they suffer just a little.

This is a very clear explanation of how, depending on one's attitudes towards one's relatives or friends, the mind of compassion arises.

Then, the text continues:

When you see enemies suffer, not only do you not develop a desire to free them from it, but you also think may they not be free from suffering and suffer even more.

This relates to one's attitude towards those one considers as enemies. When you see them suffer then, rather than wishing them to be free from suffering, you might even pray that they suffer more!

As the text states:

This is due to your lack of affection for them. Your lack of affection for enemies is commensurate with your pleasure in their suffering.

It is indeed true that in our ordinary state of mind, we wish for our close relatives and friends to be free from suffering and pray that they may be free from suffering. Yet it is the opposite for enemies; when they suffer, we might even wish them to suffer more, and their suffering pleases us. That is the sort of worldly attitude we are preoccupied with in our daily life.

Then in relation to the third category, neutral beings, the text says:

Being neutral, unable to bear or please with the sufferings of persons towards whom you have neutral feelings results from your having neither affection nor lack of affection for them.

This explains our attitude towards those who are neither friends or relatives, nor enemies.

There will be a more extensive explanation on how to overcome these very selfish, worldly attitudes and develop genuine compassion further on in the text. However, we need to really contemplate the introductory points that have been explained here as part of our own practice. Begin by examining whether one has that very gross, mundane worldly attitude of wishing one's friends to be well and feeling unhappy they are unwell, while being glad if one's enemies are unwell. If these attitudes prevail, then ultimately they only us bring more personal suffering.

From a practical point of view, feeling joy and happiness when one's enemies are suffering, and unhappiness when things are going well for our enemies, will just bring us a lot of mental suffering. If our so-called enemies or people we dislike start to do the same to us, it will make us feel very unhappy and uncomfortable. So adopting a negative attitude towards others will just create the conditions to feel uncomfortable and unhappy oneself. We can see how adopting such negative attitude merely brings us more personal suffering. So by adopting negative attitudes to others we lose out in the long run. If we do notice that we have these thoughts about people we dislike, then it is good for us to really try to overcome them.

The way we do this is to consider that regardless of whether they are relatives or enemies, everyone equally wishes for happiness, and doesn't want to experience any kind of suffering. To that extent, we are all exactly the same. Just like us everyone wishes to experience every type of happiness and to avoid any kind of suffering. 'Just as I, or my relatives, would not wish to experience suffering, and wish to experience happiness, likewise my so-called enemy or someone who I dislike, also wishes to experience happiness and joy.'

There are some people who, even though they may have a disagreement with someone or don't get along with them, will actually go out of their way to go and visit them or send gifts and so forth if some kind of tragedy or illness befalls the other. This is very good conduct. Even though there may be differences and they don't get along normally, in a time of tragedy and difficulties they actually make an attempt to uplift the spirits of the other. That is the token of a good will.

It is really good for us to practise seeing all others as equally having the right to experience happiness and not to experience any kind of suffering. If we train our mind in that way we will benefit personally. If we put a distance between and ourselves and others, then both sides lose out. But if we make an attempt to develop a little bit of kinship and closeness, then both sides benefit, and there is a great advantage in that.

In the past I have related how, early in my life, I had fights with another boy. We kept at a distance from each other because we each labelled the other as someone who we disliked. During our fights we both lost out as we

both received wounds on our heads. [*Geshe-la laughs*] After time had passed, we actually started to develop a friendship. We became so close that we ended up sharing everything that we had. Whatever food or presents we had, we naturally wanted to share it with each other. If one of us were unhappy and suffering, the other would feel unhappy too. That was the measure of the closeness and kinship that we developed, and we both benefited from that.

Before we conclude for the evening, it would be appropriate to spend a few more minutes in meditation. This time the object of our meditation is the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. Withdrawing from all forms of distraction we maintain a full attention and focus completely on the sound of the mantra. Then when the mantra stops, we will try to maintain the focus on the residue of that sound for a few moments. So we will apply the meditation technique in that way.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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