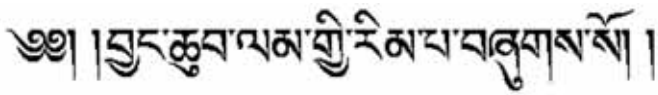

The Condensed Lam Rim



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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17 August 2011

As usual we can spend some time for meditation. For that purpose, we can adopt a relaxed and comfortable physical posture.

I regularly mention that one purpose of practising meditation is to make our mind serviceable, particularly to have control over the mind. If we pay attention, we will notice that a lot of our problems are due to a lack of control over our mind. We need to pay attention to states of mind that influence our behaviour and activities. To ensure that we behave appropriately and that our actions are positive, we must not follow improper or incorrect states of mind. This is because our behaviour is mostly influenced by our mind; if we allow ourselves to be influenced by negative states of mind, it will definitely initiate inappropriate behaviour.

You might have all become familiar with the term 'karma' in Buddhism, which literally means 'action'. However what initiates any action from our side is a state of mind. Therefore the definition of 'karma' is intention, which is a particular state of the mind that serves as a motivator. When we relate our own behaviour to karma, we will see the need to analyse the intentions that initiate our behaviour – which is either positive or negative. This shows the relevance of karma in relation to our own actions.

In Buddhism, the meditation technique of developing a calm mind is the first stage in the systematic development of a sustained state of single-pointed concentration called 'calm abiding'. Based on this state of mind, one is able to develop special insight – a heightened or acute state of wisdom.

Relating this to our present capacity, we can see that when the mind is settled and calm, we are naturally able to use our intelligence in a most effective way. Even if one is quite intelligent, if the mind is completely distracted, one is unable to utilise that intelligence effectively. So first we need a settled, calm mind; based on that, one is able to use one's intelligence. This combination of a calm mind and acute intelligence or wisdom is the most effective way for us to make the right choices and good decisions throughout our life. Having a calm mind – even up to the point of having a single-pointed focused mind – is in itself not really the most beneficial we can achieve. It does not serve that much of a purpose if you lack intelligence or wisdom. Both aspects of the mind are encouraged in the Buddhist teachings. While we attempt to develop a calm mind, we must also not neglect developing wisdom. It is through the combination of a calm mind coupled with wisdom that one will be able to achieve both one's temporary and ultimate goals. This is a crucial point for us to note.

In practice, this means that when we adopt the meditation technique of focusing on a particular object, such as the breath, while one part of the mind is focused on the object, another part of the mind can periodically check whether one is applying the technique appropriately or not. The part of

mind doing that analysis is, at this simple level, increasing one's wisdom. When further developed, this analytical mind is what one uses in what is called analytical meditation – a deeper analysis of more complex topics in Buddhism. Analytical meditation enables us to really analyse the more profound levels of the Buddhist teachings, and gain more profound insights into the mind, the nature of reality, and so forth. So initially one can combine calm abiding and wisdom by checking one's meditation technique and one's mind, making sure one is applying the right technique, and so forth.

Some people have confided in me that, if they resort to just focusing on their breath and do not apply the analytical part of the mind to checking whether they are using the proper technique, they may arrive at a state of complacency, where the mind becomes duller. Thus instead of making the mind brighter and clearer, their mind becomes duller, almost to the point where the mind sinks into darkness, when they try to only focus on the meditation object.

Essentially, we need to pay attention to increasing our wisdom in our practice of meditation. Meditation practice actually serves as a tool to help us apply our intelligence or wisdom on any occasion, particularly when we come out of meditation. Some people lament that during meditation practice they seem quite focused and relaxed, 'but as soon as I come out of meditation my mind becomes completely chaotic and disturbed by what I see outside'. That is an example of someone not having been able to utilise their intelligence or wisdom. Everything is fine when they are doing meditation practice, but when they come out of meditation, everything becomes chaotic and the outside world once again disturbs them. This is the case when they have not been able to apply their intelligence to dealing with the outer situation.

Thus if one falls into a state where one's mind seems focused, but complacent and dull, this will lead to a sort of stupor or dark state of mind. For example, if we were meditating on the breath, using the breath as an object on which to focus, while one part of the mind remains completely focused on the breath, another part of the mind needs to also periodically check whether the mind is really focused or whether it has become distracted. This awareness or constant vigilance is technically called 'introspection': checking whether one is focused on the breath or not and just being totally aware. That, in itself, allows one's mind and intelligence to work at the same time. Thus through our meditation practice, we will be simultaneously cultivating a focused mind and an intelligent mind or wisdom side by side.

Now we will apply the meditation technique, where we again readjust our physical posture, so that we are sitting upright, relaxed and in a comfortable posture. Likewise, we ensure that our mind is in a clear and bright state. From within this clear, bright state of mind, make the commitment for the next few minutes: 'I will not allow my mind to be distracted by external distractions, discursive thoughts such as memories of the past or speculation about the future. Instead, I will completely withdraw my mind from all forms of distraction, external and internal, and bring my entire focus onto the breath itself. I will remain completely aware of each inflow and outflow of the breath, and place my entire focus on the breath itself.' For the next few minutes, we will engage in this practice to the best of our capacity.
[Pause for meditation]

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
4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2. The actual training in the stages
4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1. Training the mind to strive for the welfare of others
4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1. Establishing the basis for that mind to arise
4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1.1. Establishing a balanced attitude towards sentient beings

We have not been able to cover the text for a few sessions. If there are any questions, I am happy to address them; otherwise, with the short time we have left, we can perhaps go over one or two passages from the text. If there are no questions that means less work for me! [*Geshe-la chuckling*]

Following from where we left off last time, the topic being discussed is developing what is called equanimity – cultivating equanimity in one’s attitude towards other beings.

In explaining how to cultivate equanimity, first we develop equanimity in relation to the three types of being we normally relate to. Ordinary people naturally categorise others into what are called ‘friends’ – people and relatives who are close to them; then there are ‘enemies’ – those we dislike or feel distant from; and ‘strangers’ – those for whom we feel neither good nor bad feelings. One tends to feel strong attachment towards friends, aversion towards enemies, and a sense of impartiality towards strangers. Developing equanimity means having an equal attitude towards people in all three categories.

The text now explains the different types of equanimity. Some of you are familiar with what are called The Four Immeasurable Thoughts, one of which is immeasurable equanimity. Immeasurable equanimity is the wish for all other beings to be free from strong attachment or aversion towards each other, being close to some and distant to others. However the equanimity we discussed earlier comes from one’s own side – one develops a sense of equanimity where one is neither feeling too close to friends and relatives, nor too distant towards enemies and strangers. This is the type of equanimity which serves as the cause for developing bodhicitta.

The development of impartiality or equanimity towards other beings is the basis for developing impartial love and compassion towards other beings. On the basis of impartial love and compassion towards all sentient beings, one will be able to then develop what is called ‘superior intention’ and then ‘bodhicitta’ - which is the altruistic wish to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. The text introduces the sevenfold cause and effect sequence of developing bodhicitta, but prior to developing the sevenfold cause and effect sequence, one must develop equanimity.

This is because, without the feeling of equanimity towards others, there is no way one can develop impartial love and compassion. As long as there is a distinction between friend, enemy and stranger, there is no possibility of developing impartial love and compassion towards other beings. The analogy is like making a nice drawing: first, you have to

have a smooth surface on the canvas; based on the smooth surface, you can then make a nice drawing as you wish. The smooth canvas is like an impartial state of mind, or equanimity. When we develop that first, we can then develop great love and compassion towards other beings, followed by superior intention. Based on that we then develop bodhicitta.

When we think about why we lack equanimity towards others, it is because for as long as we can remember, we have made the distinction between friends, enemies and strangers. For as long as we continue to have that distinction in our mind, there is no way for us to develop equanimity towards all beings. When we look further into why we categorise others into friends, enemies and strangers, we will notice that it is because we believe that our friends benefit us, our enemies harm us and strangers are indifferent towards us. The reason we call others enemies is that we have the view they are harming us. We view strangers as those who neither help nor harm us, so therefore we feel indifferent towards them. For as long as we make these distinctions, we will always feel bias towards others: desire and attachment towards friends; aversion towards enemies, and indifference to strangers. This is why we need to develop equanimity.

Now the text goes on to explain the stages of developing equanimity. Perhaps we can leave that for our next session.

Recapping the main points discussed here, in order to develop great love and compassion towards all beings, one needs to first develop a sense of equanimity. Equanimity is an unbiased attitude that sees all beings as equal. With this unbiased attitude, it is possible to develop great love and compassion towards them, followed by the superior intention of taking the responsibility to benefit other sentient beings oneself, which is the basis for developing bodhicitta. When we think about the sequence of developing the altruistic state of mind called bodhicitta it can really inspire us. There are noble beings called bodhisattvas who have developed that altruistic mind, which wishes to benefit every single living being without exception, by bringing them happiness and removing all causes of suffering. We can be inspired to develop bodhicitta ourselves by following the practices of these great bodhisattvas.

When we see, through these noble beings, the possibility of developing unbiased love and compassion towards all beings, we can feel inspired to develop this too, because we have the basis within ourselves right now, which is the love and compassion that we have towards others now. It might be biased and partial right now, but whatever love and compassion we have can be further developed and improved. That partial love and compassion we have for others now can be transformed into unbiased love and compassion – what is called great love and compassion, which is love and compassion that extends to all beings. This is how we can be inspired.

As I regularly emphasise, whatever degree of love and compassion we may have right now is the most valuable asset we possess. This is because it is the optimum attitude contributing to our well-being, particularly our state of mind. A sense of love and compassion brings purpose to one’s life, a sense of joy and connection to others. Rather than feeling alienated and distant from others, the sense of love and compassion within us makes us feel genuinely connected with others. When we feel genuine connection to others, there is no room for one to feel left out, lonely or neglected. This naturally brings us a sense of real joy and

happiness. What could be more valuable than something that brings us a real sense of well-being, purpose and happiness?

Wherever we go, whatever we do, or whomever we associate with, when we access this sense of love and compassion within us, we can make a genuine connection and have warm feelings towards others. There is no question about how the loving and compassionate attitude within us can have a positive effect upon other human beings, and upon the connection we can make with others. Even animals experience well-being and a sense of connection and joy from a loving and compassionate attitude. The other day, I noticed a TV show about how animals of different species have developed very strong bonds and relationships. What makes this amazing and quite remarkable is that these animals are from completely different species that may otherwise have no interaction. However, when these animals of different species connect, the amount of affection they express to each other is amazing, wondrous.

The particular show I saw this week documented the case of a sheep and an elephant who had become friends. Some of you may have seen it yourself on Monday. It was quite amazing to see the bond between them. At one point, when the elephant had become ill and was not eating, the sheep stopped eating as well. While the elephant was lying down, the sheep was just roaming about, looking at it and looking very sad. The week before, the program showed the relationship between a dog and a goat. Again, it was quite amazing to see the bond they had. The point here is that these are clearly animals of different species: normally you wouldn't see an elephant and a sheep going about together and being friends. So if animals of completely different species can have a genuine connection and a good relationship, there is no question of the bond that we, as human beings of the same species, can develop through affection and genuine love and compassion for each other. If that bond takes place, the sense of joy and happiness from companionship will definitely take place. So these examples from the animal world clearly show how unimaginable things can take place as a result of love and compassion. Therefore I feel that we cannot underestimate the great value of love and compassion, and we must further cultivate it.

When we are with others, a sense of love and compassion is what enables us to develop genuine companionship with them – warmth, good feelings, feeling comfortable with them. In contrast, there will be a lack of warm feelings when a sense of hostility or ill-feeling is experienced, for example, between two companions, whether they are partners or just friends. In the case of two partners, it would be good if they could investigate and talk about it, discuss what happened: 'Things used to be very good between us, there used to be nice feeling between us, so what has happened? Why do we feel hostility here? Why do we feel ill-will towards each other?'

If one were in such a situation and were to discuss and investigate it, one might notice that the sense of genuine affection between you and the other had declined. When that sense of affection, of concern, of love and compassion towards each other weakens, it will be replaced by ill-will and hostility. If both parties investigate sincerely, they would realise that the cause of the feelings of hostility and ill-will towards each other were not related to any external factor; rather it is related to something that has changed within themselves. The genuine feeling of concern and affection for each other is tainted with a little bit of hostility,

a negative attitude towards the other. When that is developed on either side, this causes ill-will and an uncomfortable feeling. So it is clear that the cause of that hostility is within one's mind rather than some external sources. That is my conclusion. Some of you may agree, some may be unsure, and some may disagree. However, this is what I have come to understand.

You may however feel that when the relationship becomes a bit strained, it is the other's fault '...it is not mine, nothing is wrong with me, it is the other's fault' [*laughter*]. That strong sense of 'I' – 'it is not my fault, it is the other's fault' – comes from a strong sense of self-righteousness, of grasping at the self and at one's own opinion. As long as one believes that one is not at fault, there is no room for discussion. The reason I share this with you is in the hope and with the intention that it might be of some practical benefit in your life. Indeed if one were to pay attention and analyse one's state of mind and see how these things work out, one might find there is some truth in it. When one sees some truth in it, there is room for one to resolve to change, and some transformation will take place. This will be of benefit in one's life.

Again I can say confidently that I have quite a lot of experience in my own life of the great benefits that can be derived from good companionship. Wherever I travel, I seem to have many friends and companions. [*Geshe-la chuckling*] In terms of numbers, maybe I can safely say that no one else has as many friends as I have! [*laughter*] For example, when I was in Sydney and going out from the place where we were staying, or from the centre there, many people greeted me, saying 'hello'. The person accompanying me commented: 'How come everyone is greeting you and saying hello to you all the time?'

Regardless of whether you know someone else or not, if you show a nice facial gesture and say hello, others will naturally be inclined to say hello and greet you too. This shows it benefits them; that is why they appreciate it. Their response is an expression of their appreciation.

So there are many ways of bringing about more joy and happiness in the world.

Before we conclude for the evening let's again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time, the object of our focus will be the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. Try to keep your full attention and focus on the sound of the mantra itself.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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