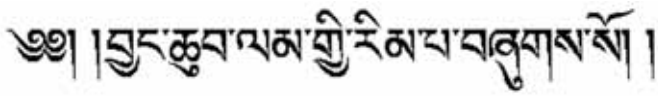

The Condensed Lam Rim



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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As usual we can spend some time in meditation. So we sit in a comfortable, upright posture. We also need to ensure that we discipline the mind. If we don't discipline the mind it can be in a chaotic state. So we have to discipline the mind.

Indeed, when we have a disciplined mind, then we have a sense of wellbeing. Things can go relatively well for ourselves when we have a disciplined mind. If we lack a disciplined mind, that's when things can get out of control.

A disciplined mind means having a serviceable mind. An example is that when a child is ready to follow advice, they are ready to listen. So our mind needs to be like that, a serviceable mind. Children who readily follow their parents' advice and are disciplined make it easy for their parents to take care of them. A disciplined mind adopts whatever good qualities it comes into contact with and then puts it into practice. A disciplined mind will allow good intentions and attitudes to develop.

When we ensure that our mind is in a disciplined state, then the combination of a relaxed physical body and a disciplined mind will allow us to experience deep wellbeing, tranquillity and calmness. This is the benefit of having a combination of a relaxed body plus a disciplined — focused mind. Alternatively, if we let our mind just roam and follow every distraction, then we have an undisciplined mind, which also influences our physical body. This means we will start becoming overly mentally active as well as overly physically active with worldly concerns, which is a cause for us to feel turmoil, anxiety and stress.

A disciplined state of mind is required to get the most out of meditation. Two unique mental tools for acquiring a focused meditative state of mind, are mindfulness and introspection. Mindfulness is a state of mind where we familiarise ourselves with an object that we choose to focus on. We need to really familiarise and recognise it well. And then we constantly recall, and constantly bring to our mind the chosen object. This involves recognising the object, and when we recognise that object, then we familiarise ourselves with it and bring it to mind.

The mindfulness that is mentioned here as a tool for meditation is a specific state of mind where the main task is, after becoming familiar with the object, to constantly bring that object to mind to the point where we have an unceasing recollection of that object in our mind. For example, when we are very hungry we don't need to put much effort into remembering images of food; visions of food will come to our mind vividly, effortlessly and

clearly. Because of our hunger, whatever else we might be occupied with, the foremost thought in our mind is food.

Another example is when we have a strong attachment. The object of our attachment comes to our mind vividly and unceasingly. Because of our attachment, the object is in the forefront of our mind, and we easily focus on the object of our attachment. These are the worldly analogies of how it is possible to bring an object to mind vividly and clearly and unceasingly. Likewise, for an object in meditation we need to use our mindfulness to bring the object of meditation to mind vividly and clearly. Having brought the object to mind, we might find that our mind starts to wander off, because as beginners it is easy to lapse from our attention or focus. There may be times we do not even recognise that our mind is wandering away from the object.

Thus another tool for meditation is introspection, which is vigilant in monitoring our focus on the object of meditation. If we are constantly vigilant about looking inward, then when we notice that the mind starts to wander off, we are able to immediately bring our attention back onto the object. That ability to recognise that the mind has wandered off and to bring it back is the function of introspection. Furthermore, if the mind is focused on the object, then we don't need to try to reassess ourselves again and again. If the mind is focused on the object, it simply maintains that focus.

When we adopt an appropriate and genuine technique of meditation by using the two tools of mindfulness and introspection, it also helps to increase wisdom within ourselves, otherwise known as intelligence. That wisdom is cultivated through the familiarity of being diligent in focusing on the object and making sure that we are not wavering away from it. In general, the initial intelligence and wisdom that we use to assess our meditation practice increases our intelligence and wisdom to the point where we are able to check, distinguish and identify positive and negative states in our mind.

There are also further benefits beyond the meditation session. Through the familiarity of being in tune with our meditation practice, and our focus on the object and using our wisdom during meditation, we will be able to access and use that wisdom in our general life to detect and distinguish between negative and positive states of mind. This makes it easier for us to adopt those that are positive and discard or minimise negatives states of mind or attitudes. This ability to discriminate is an essential tool in our life. When we adopt positive qualities and discard the negative ones, then this transforms our life for the better in whatever we do.

As I regularly emphasise, we need to ensure that the meditation practice serves to compensate for our lack of wisdom, i.e. it's a method to increase our wisdom. This is essential. When we adopt the unmistakable technique of meditation, it serves to increase our wisdom. We need to acknowledge that, and understand how the intelligence or wisdom is essential in our life to be able to distinguish between what is positive or useful and what is negative and detrimental to our wellbeing. When we are able to distinguish that clearly, then we have the full capacity to

recognise and adopt what is useful and discard what is not useful.

When we gain the ability to do that for ourselves, then the wisdom we have acquired will help us to make the right decisions for ourselves. We don't have to always resort to asking someone else's opinion, as we cannot expect to always be able to ask other person's opinion whenever we need to make decisions in life. And furthermore we may not be able to find a suitable person to ask opinions from. If we have that wisdom or knowledge ourselves, then that is hugely helpful to us because we'll be able to make the right decisions more often without relying on anyone else.

Because we are able to distinguish and identify what is useful and productive, we are able to make a decision to follow it through. When we see that something is not useful and not productive, then we are able to discard it. This skill and wisdom is essential in our life. Of course, it is essential for a spiritual practitioner, a Dharma practitioner, to be able to identify and adopting the right practices and discard those that are false practices. But even in ordinary life, for someone who is not that inclined to follow a spiritual path, it is essential to have this knowledge because everyone is faced with having to make decisions on daily basis. So if we have the capacity, if we have trained ourselves to make the right decisions for ourselves, isn't that a most useful asset to have for whatever we do in life? That is how we need to relate to the great importance of cultivating wisdom.

The main point I am making is that when we engage in meditation we need to be mindful of not being too preoccupied with worldly concerns but to focus well—putting our full attention on the object of our meditation. We also need to be mindful of whether we are using our intelligence and wisdom to discern and distinguish the object and discern our state of mind at the same time. This is how we increase our wisdom.

The reason why I go over the technique of meditation again and again about is because it helps us. Fully understanding what the meditation technique entails will motivate us to adopt the meditation practice. When we clearly see the benefits and virtues of meditation from our own side, then we may not have to rely on someone reminding us again and again that we need to meditate. We don't need to always be reminded by someone else because we have seen the benefit and value of meditation and thus we take the initiative to adopt it into our own life. When we rely on ourselves to meditate and not be told by others to do so, then we have secured something beneficial and useful. That is why it is important to understand this fully. So now we can adopt the meditation technique.

Adopt a comfortable physical posture that is upright but relaxed, along with a clear, bright state of mind. And within this clear, bright state of mind, bring your focus inwards. Distance your focus from all forms of distractions, be it thoughts or memories, any conceptual thoughts. Completely withdraw from all of that. Having brought your focus inward, place it upon the object, which in this meditation is our own breath. While we use the natural inflow and outflow of our breath, we need to

try to bring our full attention on the breath. As beginners, we need to regularly reassess ourselves, making sure that our mind is focused on the breath. So that reassessing by recollecting the object, for a beginner, is a most practical technique. With that familiarity we will be able to eventually place our entire focus on the object. So try to bring your full attention and focus on the breath.

[*breathing 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 are following on from the topic on developing equanimity, which was discussed in our last session. In the last session two different types of equanimity were explained, as well as the type of equanimity to be cultivated as a cause for developing the altruistic mind of bodhicitta. Now the text goes into explaining the order of how equanimity is developed.

In relation to developing equanimity, we need to keep in mind that the objects that we develop equanimity for are in relation to three types of categories that we put all beings in, that is, 'relatives and friends', 'strangers' and 'enemies'. For as long as we have attachment to some and aversion or indifference towards others, to that extent we lack equanimity because we are biased. Having attachment to some people, while having aversion or feelings of indifference to others, is an unbalanced, biased state of mind or attitude towards other beings. Therefore we need to bring our mind to the state of equilibrium, where we don't have attachment to some and aversion or anger to others.

What is explained here is the order of cultivating equanimity or steps for developing equanimity in relation to the three categories we place people in – friend, enemy, stranger. There are some texts that say to develop equanimity towards all three categories at the same time by visualising the three types of beings in front of you and then cultivating a feeling of equanimity to all three at the same time. However, in the unique presentation of this text—*The Middling Stages to Enlightenment*—as well in the *Extensive Stages to Enlightenment*, Lama Tsong Khapa mentions that we first use a stranger as our object of equanimity, because it's easy to develop unbiased equanimity towards a stranger. So we first use an object of 'stranger' to develop that. Then we can go on to 'friends' and 'enemies'. With a stranger, we neither have

strong attachment nor strong anger. We don't have any strong attachment because we do not label them as being particularly kind or nice to us. They have not particularly benefited us, nor have they harmed us in any way, so we feel no reason to have aversion towards them. An attitude that is unbiased or free from having too much attachment or too much anger towards a stranger comes more naturally to us. That is why it is easier to develop that in relation to a stranger.

To develop equanimity in a meditation practice, visualise strangers in front of you. The label we give strangers shows that we have neutral feelings of indifference towards them. They have neither benefited nor harmed us, thus we refer to them as strangers. However, even with strangers there might be slight feelings of attachment or aversion. Therefore we are training our mind to develop a completely unbiased attitude towards all strangers, having neither attachment towards some nor aversion towards others. We need to have a completely unbiased, equal state of mind that is free from attachment and aversion when we focus on all strangers.

In the meditation practice, we first visualise strangers in front of us and check our attitude towards them. If we find that there is a little bit of attachment to some, we try to reduce that attachment. If there is any aversion or anger, then we work on reducing that. We generate an attitude or feeling where we see then all being equal, without any agitation in our mind. When we reach a state of viewing all strangers as being equal, then it becomes very effective and the mind settles down. The mind calms down and we do not feel either hostility towards one stranger or any strong desire or attachment towards any others. This is a calm and natural state of mind, thus it is a very effective meditation practice.

Once we have developed a stable state of equanimity when we focus on strangers, then we can start focussing on people close to us — relatives and friends. Compared to our enemies, it will be easier to develop an unbiased attitude towards friends. This is why we use friends as a next step to develop equanimity.

At first glance we may not understand why we need to develop equanimity focussing on friends. But if we think about it in more detail, it will become apparent to us. At a glance, we may have a group of friends or relatives or others who are close, yet when we visualise that group of individuals in front of us, we may put them in a group and say 'Those are people close to me', but when we begin to bring each individual to mind, we will notice that we have a stronger feeling of attachment towards some while feeling a little aversion towards others. This is where we lack equanimity in relation to even those who we consider close. Therefore the practice involves overcoming that attitude of feeling closer to some out of attachment, and feeling a little distant to others out of aversion, where our mind develops an impartial close feeling towards all our friends, not favouring some friends, saying, 'Well these are all close, but among them, these are the closest'. And within a more selective group, we might even choose some friends as being closer still.

If we investigate why we call them close, it's because we consider them as someone who has benefited us,

someone who has been nice or kind to us. And so then we have an unbiased feeling towards them as being closer and more intimate. But in reality, even if we were to single out one person as being the closest of the close, the most intimate, we don't always see them as being so close and nice and feel affectionate towards them. Even with that one person, there are times when they appear in a good light and we feel affectionate towards them, but there will also be times that we might start feeling a little aversion towards them. And so out of aversion, we start feeling a little distant towards them. When we check into our attitudes and how we emotionally deal with others in our life, then it seems that is how we spend most of our life. Sometimes feeling close to someone and at other times feeling a little bit distant.

We go through this constant fluctuation of sometimes feeling close and at other times feeling distant. When we are feeling close, we feel we have a good companion. However when we feel distant towards our most intimate and close friend that is when we experience loneliness. This is where we can see that an unbiased state of mind, an attitude that lacks equanimity towards others is a mind that disturbs us. But if we can develop an unbiased attitude, beginning with the closest of the close, then extending that attitude to other people who are close to us, we can have an unbiased attitude towards all people that we consider close to us. We have already developed that attitude with strangers, now we can develop that with those who are close to us. The next step, which is a real challenge, is to feel equanimity towards even our enemies.

The meditation practice of developing equanimity is a gradual process where we first develop equanimity towards people that we find more comfortable — strangers. We have a little bit of an unbiased attitude towards strangers. When we develop a genuine impartiality or equanimity focusing on strangers, then we can move onto friends and then to enemies.

The term 'enemy' is used because we view that person as being totally disagreeable and unacceptable. Thus our attitude towards enemies is naturally aversion. An attitude of seeing the qualities in enemies does not occur normally, because our attitude towards enemies is that they don't have any redeeming good qualities. Therefore, we need to overcome a mind that has strong aversion to enemies. We can equalise and develop equanimity among all our enemies, seeing their good qualities and seeing them as all being dear to us. In this gradual, progressive manner, when we are able to develop impartial equanimity to all three categories of beings — friend, enemy, stranger — then we can start to extend that equanimity further to other beings, and then to all sentient beings.

How to develop this further is explained further in more detail in the text. However, what we can keep in mind is the essence of what was explained this evening, which is a gradual progressive method is a very practical approach. When we apply this method to our everyday life experience, even with one person, then this method can gradually be extended further to all beings. When we seem to lack equanimity even for one person who we

would normally consider close, then it will be difficult to develop equanimity towards others. First we can try the method with one person, trying to have real equanimity, regardless whether they appear to be nice or not. We can try seeing them in a good light at all times. After we have developed that genuinely with one person, then it will be easier for us to extend that feeling to another person that we consider close but sometimes feel indifference towards. In that way we can start expanding to more people and beings. This is a very practical approach to our practice. If we can incorporate that in our meditation, it will be very meaningful.

These techniques overcome the exaggerated attitudes in our mind about feeling either overly close, overly attached to some, and feeling repulsive or aversion towards others. For as long as we maintain that attitude in our mind, then we will never have a genuine attitude of embracing everyone.

There will always be a biased attitude towards others. Even within a family we can see when someone is biased, liking some of the children and maybe not being nice to the others, for example. But if someone is considered to be unbiased, impartial and equally nice and kind to everyone, then that person is a valued person. So we need to extend the practice from our own side. Whether others are being biased or unbiased, it is hard for us to change others' attitudes right away. It's beyond our immediate capacity.

But what is within our own capacity is to change our own attitude. So we can develop that, regardless of what others think. If others are being biased, we might not be able to change that. But just check whether we are being biased ourselves. If we find that we are being biased, then we can try to change that attitude and develop a more unbiased state of mind, an attitude of equanimity towards others. That would be more useful. So when we think about it this way, we can see the practical relevance of the meditation techniques in our daily life.

Before we conclude for the evening, let us spend a few minutes in meditation. This time the object of meditation is the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra. Try to keep your full attention and focus on the sound itself. When the recitation subsides, try to maintain an awareness of the sound itself for a few moments.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed by Peter Boothby
Edit 1 by Cynthia Karena
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
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