
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 in meditation. So for that purpose we sit in a relaxed and comfortable posture.

One of the main purposes of meditation is that it serves as a technique to improve our state of mind. In terms of improvements there are only two ways—either external improvements such as material progress and so on, or internal improvements. Of course external improvements, which are mainly improvements in external material conditions do contribute somewhat to our physical well-being. Whereas internal improvements relate to improving our state of mind, securing and increasing our mental happiness.

Having understood that there are these two types of improvements for our well-being, we then need to realise that even though we might have the capacity to improve our external well-being to a great extent, we always have the potential to improve our internal well-being—our state of mind. That is something that we always have access to. If, regardless of our external circumstances, we put our energy into working towards improving our internal well-being and increasing our happiness, then that will be worthwhile. What contributes to ones real happiness is internal values.

As mentioned earlier, improving our external conditions is done through acquiring a sufficient amount of wealth, stability, money, possessions and so forth. But the very pursuit of external conditions, which is intended to support our well-being and happiness, involves a lot of time and energy. Rather than contributing to our well-being, a peaceful mind and happiness; pursuing external conditions can lead to so many complications and problems and difficulties, which destroy our inner happiness and peace. So, if we don't pursue external conditions in the right way it can definitely bring about problems and complications.

The ultimate result is of course to have a genuinely happy and peaceful state of mind. When we adopt the right methods and techniques for improving our internal conditions, then that brings about a sense of calm and inner peace. Thus we need to really pay attention to what is it that really supports our well-being and happiness and genuine inner peace, and also be aware of what can destroy that. It is really worthwhile paying attention to thinking and analysing in this way, and then we will find true meaning in what contributes to our well-being.

We really need to analyse very carefully so we can recognise the difference between the means used to acquire external conditions, and the techniques and

methods we adopt to acquire the internal conditions of a genuine sense of peace and happiness. One of the main means of acquiring external conditions such as wealth and money and so forth, is through worldly knowledge. From a worldly perspective, you begin to increase your knowledge when you go to kindergarten and learn your ABCs; you add numbers, study the arts and so forth. So from a worldly perspective, it seems that you have increased your understanding and knowledge in order to secure a good-paying job in the future. But how much does that worldly knowledge contribute to our inner well-being, to a peaceful state of mind? Does it bring us any closer to experiencing inner peace and happiness?

At this point we realise that although worldly knowledge and so forth contributes somewhat to our physical well-being, it does not contribute to a genuine sense of happiness and calmness and inner peace. In fact, inner well-being comes about when we adopt the practice of meditation, after having received sound instruction about the method. Through the practice of meditation, a sense of inner well-being, peace and happiness gradually increases and stabilises.

At a superficial level, we may feel that we need to acquire worldly knowledge, because it contributes to our well-being. We can't ignore the importance of worldly knowledge, but if we fall into thinking that worldly knowledge alone contributes to our happiness, then we have missed the point.

Having analysed and looked into the difference between the results of pursuing worldly knowledge and having the knowledge to improve internal conditions, we then question why worldly knowledge contributes more to complications and problems rather than to a true sense of well-being, inner calm and peace.

The answer lies in understanding that the very pursuit of worldly knowledge involves methods that actually help to increase delusions such as attachment, anger, and pride. For example, acquiring worldly knowledge produces pride. Then, in the working environment one becomes jealous of people who are of higher status, competitive with those of equal status, and contempt for those of lower status. So we can see how in our working environment, this unstable state of mind that generates these attitudes only produces agitation, and definitely doesn't contribute to our well-being and inner peace.

In a very practical sense, one doesn't fit in with those of higher status because of jealousy or envy, which is a very uncomfortable state of mind; one doesn't fit in with equals because of a sense of competitiveness; and you don't even fit in with those less capable because one has a sense of contempt for them. When we are infested with these negative states of mind one does not fit into any category, and we naturally feel a sense of alienation.

In contrast to worldly knowledge, when we pursue the development of our inner well-being through the practice of meditation and so forth, the very technique that we use involves getting rid of the delusions in our mind. When we work at overcoming the delusions, these negative states of mind are replaced with a genuine sense of calm and peace and happiness. That is how worldly, external knowledge differs from inner knowledge.

The benefit and virtue of Dharma practice, specifically the meditation practice, is that as we adopt that practice our mind generally becomes calmer and more peaceful. However, the main qualities that we need to develop in our practice is a sense of love and compassion. These are really the essential qualities that we need to develop through the practice of meditation.

As mentioned many times previously, the great value of love and compassion is unequal to any other qualities. It is essential to our own well-being and happiness, and for good communication and relationships with others. Specifically, through practising love and compassion one can overcome the specific negative state of pride. With a sense of love and compassion, one will feel joyful about those who are of a higher status, being happy about their success and well-being. With those of equal status, one can mutually supportive, and encouraging because of a genuine connection with them, rather than feeling competitive. Rather than feeling contempt for those with of lower status who may be less capable or more disadvantaged, one would feel a genuine sense of compassion for their weaknesses or whatever disadvantages that they have. So in that sense, one's attitude towards others will always be genuinely gentle and harmonious, rather being a negative state of mind. This is how the practice of love and compassion actually helps to transform and develop our mind to feel a genuine sense of calm and peace.

As I often remind you, we need to relate to the practical benefits of meditation to our everyday life. When we begin to see the practical benefits of our practice of meditation, then we will feel encouraged to engage in the practice. If we see it as only of long-term benefit rather than being immediately beneficial, then it will be hard for us to feel enthusiastic, because we are creatures who like to see immediate results and benefits. As well the long-term benefits, there are definitely immediate benefits from our practice, which we need to relate to in our daily life.

Now we can actually take the time to practise meditation. As we readjust our physical posture to a comfortable and relaxed one, we also set our mind into an appropriate state, and bring to mind the object that we focus on, which is our breath.

During the time that we allocate for meditation practice, we need to be really committed to doing the practice well. Then we will actually reap the benefits. This means that for the duration that we set ourselves; we need to really bring our full focus onto the object, which is, in this case, our breath. In that way we can actually experience relief from the very distracted mind that is the cause for all our problems, anxieties, worries and so forth.

We may have individual sufferings, difficulties and problems, but the cause for whatever problems and difficulties we face is mainly related to a very distracted mind, which results in our energy being completely dispersed in every direction. So it is no wonder we become tired, and lethargic, and lose energy and direction in life.

Whereas if we train our mind to bring its full attention and focus upon one object, such as the breath, then that

allows the mind to become more centred. It specifically helps the mind to develop the ability to be more focused. And when our all energy is put into focusing on one object then, due to that familiarity in the meditation practice, we will be able to direct our full focus and energy to getting good results in whatever we do. Therefore it is really worthwhile to adopt this technique to its fullest. So we need to keep that in mind. For the next few minutes we keep our mind completely focused on the breath itself. [*meditation*]

Just as we have attempted in our short session now, if we can adopt a regular meditation practice in our daily life, it will definitely bring genuine benefits. As we would have just noticed, it contributes to settling down our mind, even if only temporarily. By settling down the mind, it brings a calmer, and more focused mind. If we adopt a regular practice of meditation, that temporary quality will become more consistent.

The main purpose of our meditation practice is to develop a general calmness in our everyday life, even when we are not in formal meditation. When we go to work or associate with others, in any circumstance or situation, we need to constantly remind ourselves that we have the in-born potential for a calm and peaceful mind. If we can tune into that, and remind ourselves that we have access to that calm and peaceful state, it can help us to maintain a general sense of calm in whatever we are doing, in whatever situation we might find ourselves.

In contrast, we are also prone to having negative states of mind. For as long as we have not overcome the delusions completely, we have the tendency to become upset and develop a disturbed state of mind. However, if we are diligent we can develop an awareness that enables us to detect a negative state of mind such as anger or strong attachment. Then we can remind ourselves that if we give in to these negative states of mind, and allow ourselves to be dominated and controlled by them, the result can only be destruction. Not only will they destroy our own sense of calm and peace, but they will cause havoc and destruction for others as well. For as long as we are diligent and mindful about that, we can protect ourselves to some degree.

The main quality that we need to be mindful of, and try to develop a genuine sense of familiarity with, is love and compassion. We need to generate the attitude that love and compassion are qualities that we need to be associated with at all times. Whether we are walking about, sitting somewhere, associating and dealing with others, in every instance and circumstance love and compassion should be our main motivation. When we have love and compassion as a companion at all times, then that will definitely contribute to our well-being and ability to make the right decisions.

When we adopt an awareness of the need for, and the importance of, love and compassion, then love and compassion will be our constant companion and friend. As I regularly mention, the greatest and most valuable companion that we can ever have, is the inner companion. When we have developed and secured that inner companion, then we need not be too worried about external companions. If we have external companions,

that's fine, but if they desert us, then it's no big deal. The quality of love and compassion will be an unfailing friend and companion who will help us at all times, and for every need.

It is because of these great benefits of love and compassion that I exhort you again and again to adopt, and become familiar with this attitude. I have mentioned in the past, and I mention again now, that I can't claim to have achieved high levels of practice. Nevertheless, what I can share is that I make every attempt to practise having a sense of love and compassion. And I have definitely found great benefit from whatever meagre effort I have made. I find that whenever some kind of agitation arises, and I adopt a sense of love and compassion, that immediately appeases the agitation — in every instance.

When I go out into the outside world, there is nothing that doesn't appeal to me, and everything is fine. The outside world abounds with objects that bring mental agitation through attachment, or aversion or anger. As I said, I don't do any great practices, but even my meagre attempts definitely help me when I am alone or when go out, or when I associate with others. In every instance it seems that with that love and compassion I am able to maintain some sort of integrity, a sense of self-esteem and calmness.

Even though I am not doing any great practice, my attempts to develop and further enhance the attitude of love and compassion brings me solace and really benefits me. Based on that, I encourage you to also adopt such a state of mind. In particular, I encourage you to develop that self-analytical state of mind.

You might feel that you are not capable of high level spiritual practice, meditating for hours on end, but that's irrelevant at this point in your life. The most useful, beneficial and practical approach that you could all adopt is self-analysis, and you don't need to be a great master or scholar to be able to adopt that practice.

'Self-analysis' means checking up on one's own thought patterns and state of mind. With a sincere approach one will be able to detect the constructive and positive states of mind that contribute to one's own well-being, and the thought patterns or emotions that are destructive. With a sincere and honest ,self-analysis one will be able to detect very clearly the thought patterns that are conducive to a sense of well-being, in contrast to the thought patterns, emotions and feelings that are destructive, and which disturb oneself and everyone else as soon as they arise. Having detected that, you then work towards promoting those positive thought patterns, emotions and feelings and states of mind. At the same time you start to slowly minimise negativities, giving them less attention and power. If we can adopt that as a daily practice, there is no question about the benefits.

I welcome questions, so, with the limited time we have left, please raise your hand if you have any.

Question: How should one distinguish between the positive effect of focusing on an object and being obsessed with focusing on an object?

Answer: Meditation is not limited to the form that focuses on just one object, which is called contemplative or

focused meditation. There is also analytical meditation, where you think about your own state of mind, and about what is helpful, what is beneficial, and what is harmful. We need to understand is that these two types of meditation need to go hand-in-hand together.

Also focussed meditation isn't limited to focusing on one thing. It can be any object that does not cause distress to the mind, i.e. either a neutral object or a virtuous object. When we really adopt a spiritual practice, in particular the Buddhist meditation practice, the teachings say that we need to keep a balance between focused, single-pointed meditation and analytical meditation. Single-pointed meditation helps to make our mind clearer and more focused, whereas analytical meditation helps to further enhance our wisdom or intelligence. A focused mind has to go hand-in-hand with wisdom to reach our real goal.

Question: I find similarity between the Buddhist mediation of bringing the focus within and the Christian explanation that the Kingdom of God is within.

Answer: Of course, as you mention, there definitely similarities in the two explanations. There are those who believe in a creator God, who created everything, both external and internal kingdoms. There are some others who believe in God but do not believe in a creator god, like some non-Buddhist schools. However, in Buddhism, we explain it as being karma; we say that all the creation in the world comes down to karma. So there are different terminologies.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has shared his insight about those who have a strong faith in God as the creator. He explains how having that faith is extremely profound and very beneficial. Very strong faith like this overcomes a strong sense of ego-grasping, and really relies upon the ultimate source of their faith. That in itself has a very profound and positive effect. That is how the Dalai Lama explains the benefits and relevance of that sort of spiritual tradition, and I think masters from other traditions may explain it in the same way. It does seem, though, that the Dalai Lama has deep insight about the benefits of each spiritual tradition.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama also seems to derive his understanding from the presentation of Jesus' teachings. In his recent teachings in India, he mentioned that within the Christian tradition there definitely seems to be a presentation that helps to reduce the two most essential negativities, which are the self-cherishing mind, and craving for the material world and so forth.

As His Holiness explained, the method to overcome a strong self-cherishing mind in the Christian tradition arises from an unwavering, strong faith in God. At the moment when that strong faith in God is experienced, one's sense of self-importance and a self-cherishing mind is definitely not present. This is the profound way in which the Dalai Lama explains the relevance of such a practice. I wonder how many Christian followers would be able to explain how to overcome self-cherishing in that particular way.

His Holiness further went on to comment that when he speaks about the relevance and benefits of the Christian

faith, some priests say “Oh, you must be a Christian!”, because he explains it so well.

Question: There is a belief that when we die, all the deeds that we have done in our life—good and bad—will be shown to us. Is that true?

Answer: There is also a belief in some parts of our system—whether we take it literally or not—that the god of death will show you a mirror where you will be able to see everything that you have done in your life. The main point, that we Buddhists adhere to, whether we take the descriptions literally or not, is that whatever we do—good or bad—is not lost. It remains within our psyche as an imprint.

One thing which seems to support this belief is the visions of those people who have a near-death experience or the experiences of people who are actually dying. The teachings say that those who have dedicated their life to the well-being of others, doing good in service and virtue, seem to have more happy appearances that bring a sense of joy. On the other hand those who have been inclined to create a lot of negativity and so forth have a sense of fear or sorrow in their mind. Apparently, those who have gone to war have stories of how people who are about to die who, even though there is no immediate threat, claim that soldiers coming after them, and they seem to have a lot of anxiety and fear in their eyes. In fact there are no soldiers coming towards them at that moment, but their familiarity with war so dominates their psyche, that at that moment they see these visions of soldiers coming towards them. So it seems that that the appearance dominates the psyche and experience at that moment of death is whatever one is most familiar with, whether it be virtue or non-virtue.

I appreciate your questions!

I don't know how authentic or credible, or what their origins are but, as mentioned earlier, some Buddhist texts, (even in our tradition) mention that there is a demonic god of death who holds up a mirror where you see all the events of your life reflected in that mirror.

Whether we take that literally or not, what we can understand is that what one experiences at the time of death, is very much related to what we are most familiar with, and what we do in our life. If we do good things, and try to lead a life of joy and happiness now then, because of our familiarity with that, that will be the most apparent experience death and in the afterlife. Whereas a life of negativity and violence will generate the same experience at death and in the afterlife.

Before we conclude for the evening, we can take a few moments for the practice of meditation. This time the object that we focus on can be the sound of the mantra that will to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. As we hear the sound, we try to keep our full attention and focus on the sound of the mantra. And, as the recitation stops, we just maintain our focus for a while. In that way it becomes a practice of focussed meditation.

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