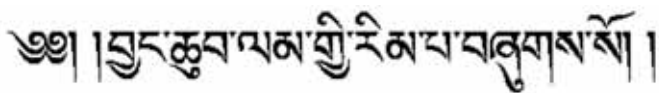

The Condensed Lam Rim



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—doing a good meditation is really worthwhile. In order to have a good meditation we need to first secure ourselves into a relaxed and comfortable posture, and then ensure that we have a good intention and motivation.

A good meditation could be defined as engaging in a contemplative practice to help to promote good qualities within ourselves and, in particular, try to further increase the virtues we already have within our own mind. When our practice ensures that this takes place, then we can be assured that it has been a good meditation.

We engage in the practice of meditation as a way to cultivate virtue that has not yet been developed and to maintain and further increase whatever virtue we have already cultivated. Now in order to do that, we need to recognise that there may be obstacles and hindrances which prevent that cultivation and development from happening. At the same time there are also practices conducive to the enhancement of virtue. In fact in any activity that we may engage in, whatever it may be, we can detect that there are always pros and cons—factors that help to contribute towards that action and attitudes that actually hinder or obstruct that action. As this is true for any activity we undertake, it is really important that we realise that.

Understanding that all of our activities, including worldly ones, will have these two factors can help us to not feel discouraged when something doesn't go well. We often don't accomplish things, and let things go half-finished because we become daunted and discouraged. But if we fully understand that there are both conducive and hindering factors then, when something does not go well as a result of obstacles or hindrances, our understanding will give us the foresight to perhaps overcome those difficulties and hindrances.

Maintaining this attitude of understanding that there are both helpful and hindering factors can help us, as it is our attitude that is the major factor in determining whether our efforts are successful or not. Practically speaking, we need to really understand the way our mind works, the attitudes that we hold on to, and how having certain attitudes can affect us either positively or negatively. This is something that is worthwhile to look into.

Likewise there are also the pros and cons in taking the initiative to practise meditation as a means to cultivate, maintain and increase virtue within one's own mind. How does the meditation technique actually help one? The answer is that meditation actually protects one's mind. If we can maintain vigilance and protect our mind, then that will allow us to cultivate, maintain, and increase good qualities and virtues.

As human beings, each and everyone of us has great intelligence, abilities and potential. That is something that

we all naturally possess; it is one of the 'pros' that we all have. However the 'con' that hinders whatever positive activities we engage in, and whatever aims we have for ourselves, is basically an unruly mind, harbouring a negative attitude.

Having an unruly mind distracts us, and influences us to engage in all sorts of frivolous and meaningless activities, which do not contribute to fulfilling whatever goals we have set for ourselves. When we allow ourselves to become distracted and then engage in all sorts of activities, which even in a conventional sense are considered as a waste of time, we might justify ourselves saying, 'Well, there's not been much harm done'.

However, at the end of the day, despite having become distracted and engaging in all those frivolous, meaningless activities, one begins to feel quite depressed and miserable. This can lead one to become negative about everything, which is quite common. When we look around, we see that there are many who feel very depressed, who have lost hope and direction in life, and who have low self esteem. These are really unfortunate states to find oneself in.

When we look into the causes that led them into that state, it really comes down to not having exerting oneself to really protect one's mind and maintain self esteem. It is that lack of protection that has basically led to that situation. We need to take that on board and really understand the need to protect one's mind.

If, having reached the state of feeling totally hopeless, depressed, directionless and so forth one were to honestly check, one would notice that it is the consequence of not having protected the mind—although, of course, that might not be very apparent initially.

In fact, being influenced by distractions and giving in to one's unruly state of mind, is allowing oneself to be influenced by what Buddhism calls the delusions. These delusions are so deceptive and devious that the individual under their influence may not even recognise them thinking, 'There's nothing wrong with me, I am just being myself'.

On the other hand, people around them begin to notice that they have gone astray, and are not taking personal responsibility for themselves. While others might initially encourage us, and try to keep us on track they will naturally start to shy away if we keep following our self-destructive path. Companions, friends or relatives may start to keep their distance, and if we don't take the initiative to look into the real cause of what is happening, we may start thinking that others have abandoned us and don't care. In fact, the main cause really comes down to not having taken the initiative to protect one's own mind, and allowing it to be influenced by frivolous, sensual distractions.

There are many examples of giving in to, and allowing the mind to be influenced by, negative states such as attachment and jealousy. When we honestly look into ourselves and our own state of mind, we can see that feeling jealous is not a happy state of mind. This unhappiness is even more apparent with anger. When our mind is dominated by anger, it is not a happy state to be in; and if we allow ourselves to be influenced by anger and don't do anything about it by taking the initiative to try to deal with it ourselves, we might start blaming others. We might end up in a situation of constantly blaming others for everything that is occurring in our life. All of this leads us back again to the necessity of protecting the mind.

So it is extremely important to be really diligent and mindful about what state our mind it is in, and the kinds of attitude we are holding onto. We should be in a constant state of vigilance and personal analysis of our own state of mind, constantly questioning whether we are being influenced by positive or negative attitudes.

It is really important to be able to immediately detect a delusion the moment it begins to arise in the mind, and to recognise it as our enemy. When the Buddhist scriptures say that the real enemy lies within, they are referring to the delusions. People who are dominated by strong attachment or desire and who are completely engrossed in it, are not happy people. They don't seem to enjoy food, and seem to walk around in a daze. When they are obsessed with strong attachment, nothing else works out well. They lose direction, they are completely obsessed with that object of attachment, and temporarily nothing else matters. Now this might be alright if it were to bring about some sort of joy and a real sense of well being, but the opposite seems to be the case.

We might look into ourselves and detect strong jealousy, which is also not a happy state of mind, and because it is not a happy or healthy state of mind, we need to apply an antidote to overcome it. As described in the meditation scriptures the antidote to jealousy is developing a mind of rejoicing. When we rejoice in others' well being there's no room for jealousy to arise. That's because jealousy is a state of mind of not being happy with the good fortune of others. When things are going well for others, and we are not happy about that, that is when we feel jealous. If others are doing well in whatever it may be, their fortune, their studies, their business, and we generate an attitude that it's good that they are doing so well, then immediately that initial sense of unhappiness will be completely replaced with a sense of joy and happiness.

So in this way, when we look into our state of mind, we can see that jealousy is basically a particular kind of attitude. When we replace that attitude with rejoicing and feeling happy about the good fortune of others, then that will serve as a complete antidote to jealousy.

The antidote to anger is compassion. Whenever we feel anger towards others it is due to a lack of compassion. So when we start to cultivate compassion for others, any anger towards others will naturally be replaced by a sense of compassion, and so there is no room for anger any more. When we check in this way, we can definitely see how when we take the initiative to cultivate these sort of proper attitudes, they really do work to overcome the negative attitudes. If we apply this technique there's nothing to lose — we can only gain more and more happiness and lessen our suffering and pain. And that is what we want in life isn't it?

The very meaning of Dharma, which is the Buddhist term for spiritual practice, is to implement methods that serve to overcome suffering and provide happiness. We can see the truth of this in the way the practices of Dharma all come down to methods of cultivating happiness and strengthening a sense of inner joy and happiness, and removing suffering.

The technique for overcoming the jealous state of mind that causes us suffering is developing the mind of rejoicing. Likewise, the scriptures say that the best way to overcome anger is to develop compassion. Again we can see that compassion directly affects and opposes the negative state of anger. As one develops compassion, anger is naturally

reduced to the point where it does not affect our mind and we do not experience the discomfort of anger. So Dharma definitely serves its purpose, and when we understand how it actually works, we begin to really appreciate it. As we relate to the practical benefits described in the Dharma, we begin to appreciate the teacher, i.e. Buddha Shakyamuni. That is how we begin to develop a mind of appreciation for the Dharma.

There are three objects of refuge in Buddhism, and of these three, the real refuge giving ultimate protection is said to be the Dharma. The word 'Dharma' does not relate merely to the scriptures, but is a state of mind that has overcome the delusions. Thus, the real Dharma that protects us is our own subdued state of mind. When we have cultivated a positive state of mind, then that is our real protector. So Dharma is a very personal and intimate factor. Our protector is not someone out there, some other being that we have to try to constantly please, but something that we develop within ourselves. This is really profound; it gives the individual the responsibility and power to protect themselves. This is how we need to understand the term Dharma described in the teachings.

Returning to the main point, we can understand that meditation is essentially a technique that helps to protect our own mind. We also discussed the benefits of protecting our own minds and the negative consequences of not doing. Therefore, there are many things that we can think about.

We will now engage in the practice of contemplative meditation for a few minutes. We adjust our physical posture so that it is upright but comfortable and, as mentioned earlier, we generate a positive motivation. We make a commitment to focus on our breath and that commitment can be developed by going over the main points as we set the motivation for our practice. We can remind ourselves that there are a lot of faults in not protecting our mind, and that there are definite benefits and advantages in protecting it.

The optimum way to protect one's mind is to have a clear and focussed mind. The technique that we are going to engage in now is focussing on the breath. By thinking, 'I am fully committed to doing this practice now' we encourage ourselves to be fully engaged in the practice over the next few minutes. Allowing the mind to be distracted is a fault, so we need to intentionally withdraw our focus and thoughts from all other forms of distractions, completely withdraw from all good or bad thoughts, and bring our focus into ourselves. Then having brought our focus inwards, we place it upon our own breath. As we inhale and exhale naturally, we keep our entire focus on the breath. Then we maintain our focus on the breath for the next few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*).

That will be sufficient for now. If you have any questions I will be happy to address them, but if there are none questions, then that could be a bit of a break for me.

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
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of all
4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1.2.2. Recalling their kindness
4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1.2.2.4. An alternate way to cultivate
the essence

In the text, we have reached the point of the technique to develop great love and compassion.

The first part of the sequence is to recall the kindness of other beings, by recognising them as equally having been one's mother at one time or another. That is because we have taken so many countless past lives that, at one time or another, every being would have taken their turn many times over in being our mother.

Then the teaching went on to explain that having developed that recognition, we have to recall the kindness of each being when they have been our mothers.

Next there is an explanation of a practical way to remember the kindness of all beings. The teachings suggest that we envision our own mother of this life in front of us, and recall all the ways in which she has been kind to us, from the moment we were conceived, during the pregnancy, and after our birth.

Now we come to the topic: An Alternate Way To Cultivate The Essence.

It is mentioned in the Buddhist scriptures that doing positive deeds for particular categories of beings can be highly virtuous or meritorious. These categories include the buddhas who are, of course, endowed with great qualities. If we relate to the buddhas with nice gestures, then that is a means to accumulate great virtue and merit. The next category are beings who are stricken with great illness or poverty. Benefitting such beings or relating to them in a positive way is also a source of great merit; - much greater than if we relate to any other ordinary person. The third category is our parents, particularly our mother. They are said to be the object of one's kindness. Thus doing positive deeds for one's parents is also said to accumulate great merit and virtue.

It is not illogical to contemplate the reason for displaying good gestures towards and doing good deeds for someone who has been extremely kind to us. It is fitting, in both a conventional and religious sense, to repay that kindness. Of all those who have been kind to us in this life, our parents are said to be the kindest of all. Thus the teachings emphasise the need for us to recognise and repay that kindness.

As this text explains, contemplate single-pointedly how your mother gave you help and happiness, and kept you away from harm and suffering to the best of her knowledge and ability. Although one's mother is mentioned specifically in the text, it also applies to one's father as well. Of course we cannot blame her for not having done enough if things were beyond her capacity or knowledge and understanding; our mother helped us and kept us from any kind of harm to the best of her ability and knowledge.

She not only helped us in the early stages through her pregnancy, but after we were born and as we were growing up. Those who still have mothers now are still cared for by

their mothers. When we contemplate the way in which they cared for us in the past, how they care for us now and how they will continue to care for us in the future, we can develop a real deep sense of appreciation of our mother's kindness.

We all have a natural bond with our parents but that unique bond will be appreciated on a much deeper level when we contemplate our mother's kindness in this way. Too often we take things for granted. This is a way to really contemplate and to bring that bond into one's heart, which will move the mind to feel, 'It is now fitting for me to do whatever I can, to the best of my ability, to try to help my parents'. In this way, wishing to repay the kindness of all beings can naturally be developed, based on remembering and feeling the actual kindness for one's parents in one's heart.

In essence, one contemplates how one's mother provided us with help and happiness and cleared away harm and sufferings to the best of her knowledge and ability. When that becomes a deeply felt appreciation, the natural inclination will be for one to take responsibility for helping our mother to be happy and clear away any harm and unhappiness that she may have to the best of our ability and knowledge. That is something which we can naturally take the initiative to do from our own side. This is a practical way of engaging in the practice.

The next heading concerns remembering and wishing to repay the kindness of our, other relatives and then other beings. So having cultivated this thought with respect to our own mother, we then apply it to other beings as well.

Before we conclude the session for the evening let us again take the opportunity to spend some time in meditation. This time our object of focus will be the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. Again, sitting in an appropriate posture, cultivating a clear and committed state of mind, we focus entirely on the sound of the mantra as we hear it. When the recitation subsides, we just maintain our focus on the residue of the sound for a while, and in that way we engage in this meditation practice.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed by Ai Chin Khor
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
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