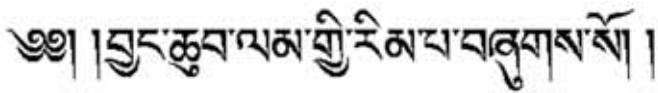

The Condensed Lam Rim



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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We can spend some time in meditation. To meditate we sit in a comfortable and relaxed posture. Then we need to have a clear and bright state of mind. When we have control over the mind that is said to be like a state of freedom of the mind. The great master, Sakya Pandita, said that freedom of the mind is the real happiness of the mind. Furthermore, it is said that having the freedom of one's mind leads to a happy mind whereas being under the control and dominance of others is an unhappy state of mind. What is being explained is that when one has full control over one's mind one gains a genuine sense of real freedom. That is something that it is worthwhile for us to keep in mind. The significance of having control over one's own mind is that one will then be able to maintain a positive state of mind on a constant basis. It is this positive state of mind that induces a happy mind.

The benefit of having control over one's own mind, and thus having a positive state of mind, can be understood by contrasting this situation to one where one's mind is not controlled. We often find, as a result of not having a controlled mind, that various types of negativity influence our mind. It is very easy for us to be influenced by negative states of mind without much effort at all. It seems spontaneous and the slightest influence will put our mind into a negative state. That is because we lack of control over our mind.

What helps one to start to have more control over one's own mind is developing a true sense of concentration. This is where the meditation technique is useful as a means to develop genuine concentration in one's mind. The Buddha's teachings explain that the ultimate state of concentration is a state where one has complete serviceability of the mind and one is able to use one's mind in to concentrate or focus on positiveness. This optimum state of concentration is called 'calm abiding' in Buddhism. Some translations use the term 'mental quiescence'.

Calm abiding is a perfected state of concentration. The means to reach that state of perfected state of concentration called calm abiding or mental quiescence is a gradual process where one applies the tools for developing concentration, with the aid of mindfulness and introspection. By applying mindfulness and introspection one gradually overcomes the faults that prevent our mind achieving a concentrated state.

When one gradually achieves the state where one is complete control over one's physical body, particularly the breath and the subtle winds within one's body that are the wind energy within us. Thus, when the wind channels or subtle energy within one's body becomes

serviceable then the body itself becomes serviceable. When the body becomes serviceable it induces a bliss within one's physical body. When one obtains that physical bliss within one's body the process of further developing concentration will induce a mental bliss. When one obtains that combination of physical and mental bliss and one is able to focus on an object for as long as one wishes, then that is the point where one obtains calm abiding or mental quiescence, which is the perfected state of concentration.

The great masters of the past, such as Lama Tsong Khapa, have said that the significance of reaching the state of calm abiding or mental quiescence is that from then on one will be able to use one's mind to focus on any positive object for as long as one wishes. One is able to maintain a concentrated state of mind and this allows one's mind to focus on all virtue. This is the real significance of developing the perfected state of concentration.

In summarising what calm abiding is and the need to develop calm abiding, Lama Tsong Khapa mentions in a verse in one of his works that when one develops the quality of calm abiding one will be able to have a concentration that is as firm as the greatest mountain, and this makes the mind serviceable to focus on all virtues. Thus the state of mind called calm abiding is something that we need to endeavour at all times to achieve.

Lama Tsong Khapa encourages us to develop calm abiding, as calm abiding is a firm and stable state of mind, just as the greatest of mountains are firm and stable. Just as the greatest mountain cannot be easily moved by any external circumstances, with a state of mind of calm abiding one will achieve a focused concentration that cannot be distracted by the normal distractions that surround us. One obtains a very firm, stable and focused mind and very stable concentration. Furthermore, one is able to use that concentration to be in a virtuous frame of mind and that is the real benefit of developing concentration.

The text then mentions that as well as developing a very firm, stable, concentrated mind one also experiences physical and mental bliss and pliancy. Pliancy means the physical and mental serviceability that allows one to use one's body and mind to focus on any object for long as one wishes within a blissful state. One is encouraged to develop this unique state of mind called calm abiding because of the great virtue and quality that it possesses.

As well as the advice in that verse, calm abiding is the main antidote for overcoming the enemies or the delusions, should one develop such a state of mind.. Calm abiding serves as an antidote for overcoming all delusions. Deluded distractions such as sensual pleasures are what cause the mind to be disturbed.

In summary, the main point is that the practice of meditation will allow one to have a genuine state of calmness within one's mind, which is experienced through overcoming the deluded distraction within oneself. When one begins to see the virtue and the benefit of the practice of meditation, the practical way to encourage oneself to adopt the technique of meditation, in contrast to allowing one's mind to be distracted, is to

speaking to oneself in the following form, 'If I allow my mind to be influenced by the deluded distractions I will become a victim of the delusions and my mind will become disturbed and there will be no opportunity for me to experience any true sense of calmness and happiness. Therefore I must definitely exert myself to apply the technique of meditation so that I can subdue my own mind. So that is something we need to adopt.

The way to encourage oneself to adopt the practice of meditation as a means to develop genuine control and subdue one's mind, by thinking about the consequences of not having a controlled state of mind, a state of mind i.e. that is completely influenced by the deluded distractions. The consequences of the mind being completely influenced by the deluded distraction are that it is completely overwhelmed with fears and anxieties and all sorts of mental turmoil. When we look for the cause of mental turmoil our search leads to a mind that is completely influenced by the deluded distractions. The real turmoil occurs in the mind when it is influenced by deluded distractions. This prevents the mind from having a clear and happy state. So, being influenced by the distractions robs one of the opportunity to have a clear, bright and happy mind. That then causes mental turmoil.

Mental turmoil can lead to a disastrous state and consequences such as distress and depression where people consider even taking their own life out of sheer frustration and anxiety. These situations occur. This is in contrast to physical hardships. We hardly ever find situations where people have taken their own life out of mere physical hardship. So, in comparison with mental hardship, physical hardship is something that is endurable. With the right state of mind one can withstand even difficult physical circumstances. This is something that can be managed and is not too daunting. Whereas it is when mental hardships or difficulties arise that unfortunate measures such as taking one's own life can occur. This happens because mental distress leads to a state where the person feels completely hopeless. There is no clarity, and a complete lack of joy and happiness. When mental distress reaches the point where there is no clarity and a lack of joyous and happy state of mind, then it is a situation where someone could consider taking his or her own life out of sheer frustration and desperation. We cannot blame individuals for such an act; they have lost all clarity, all sense of righteousness in their mind because the mind has been overwhelmed by despair.

Even though there is no one who does not love himself or herself, being led to such a state that one even considers taking one's own life out of sheer desperation is really pitiful. If we understand why someone is led to that state we won't blame them. For them it seems that they have no choice but to take their own life. Seeing that, we need from our own side to take measures to not allow our mind to reach such a state by controlling our mind, and not allow it to be influenced by the deluded distractions.

This leads us back to the advice that was presented earlier. Seeing the ill consequences of a mind that lacks genuine concentration we should take personal responsibility to apply the techniques of developing

concentration, such as meditation on a regular basis. When we apply this technique we can gradually develop genuine concentration ourselves.

When we consider the advice of the great masters on developing our concentration as a way to have genuine control over our own mind, we will begin to realise how essential these points are. The great Indian master Shantideva said that if you don't know your own state of mind then whatever you do will not bring any lasting happiness. This, again, is really profound advice. It relates to all the points mentioned earlier. If one does not understand how one's mind works and is not constantly vigilant over one's state of mind, or does not analyse one's own state of mind, then it seems that whatever one does will not bring about any genuine state of happiness in one's mind. This is an essential point. Not knowing one's state of mind can, on a practical level, relate to not knowing how the mind works and how it is influenced by the deluded distractions and so forth. As a consequence one will not apply the methods and techniques for overcoming those influences. This advice is on a very practical level.

On a more profound level, knowing one's state of mind can relate to the ultimate state of mind that in Buddhism is called the emptiness of the mind. That is, however, a more profound level. But even when we apply this advice on a practical level we find that it is true that if we don't know how our own mind works then, because of that lack of understanding, we become an easy victim to all sorts of negative influences and negative states of mind that then cause real disturbances. It is true that when we don't know our own state of mind whatever we do we don't seem to experience a sense of genuine ease, satisfaction and joy within our mind. These are really essential points.

Another meditation master, Geshe Chen Ngawa, mentions that someone who knows their own state of mind can even transform physical hardships and problems into the path. This is another essential point. Someone who truly understands their state of mind can transform normal mishaps or difficulties so they can be utilised to further enhance one's practice along the path. Such advice is really profound.

We have related the benefits of the practice of meditation by considering the negative consequences of not developing concentration in the mind. By considering and weighing these points we can clearly see that the advantages of meditation definitely outweigh the disadvantages of not meditating. Reflecting upon the benefits of the practice of meditation, we can then take the initiative to apply some time for our own meditation practice to develop our mind.

So, we make the commitment, 'For the next few minutes I will apply the meditation technique to derive the most benefit from the practice.' In order to derive the most benefit, within even a short time, one makes the commitment not to allow one's mind to be distracted. The deluded distractions are like the main enemy that robs one of all joy and a sense of happiness. So one makes the commitment that, 'For the next few minutes I will not

allow my mind to be distracted by any kind of distracted thoughts and keep my focus entirely upon my breath.'

Developing that commitment and motivation for doing the practice is a very basic level, but it is still a really worthwhile commitment to make as a way to derive the benefits from one's practice. So, making such a commitment in our mind, we distance ourselves from all forms of thoughts and ideas and just bring our entire focus upon our breath, which is the object to focus on. For the next few minutes we will place our entire attention and focus on our natural breathing. That is how we will spend the next few minutes. (*Pause for meditation.*)

Are there any questions anyone would like to ask? Please raise your hand.

Question: Geshe-la, you mentioned that the deluded distractions are the cause of our problems. I can relate to the negative states of mind which cause pain. But when the situation is comfortable and enjoyable, such as when a good job is secured or when I am attached to someone, it is hard to notice the distraction. Is there any technique that can help one to overcome the distractions when the situation is pleasant?

Answer: As you indicated with the particular example that you used, it is definitely much harder to detect the faults of deluded distractions when things seem to be going well. However, this is where Buddhist training goes a little bit further. It goes much deeper in training one to be able to see through those seemingly good situations to see what they are based upon. If those seemingly nice situations are based on sensual pleasures and attachment then they are in the nature of what we call samsara that, as the Buddha's teaching explains, is still in the nature of suffering. That means that no matter how pleasant it may seem now, ultimately it can turn into something unpleasant so there is no real lasting happiness in that worldly situation. That is the view one must adopt.

In relation to these points, and particularly the example that you used of attachment, it is definitely much harder to detect the ill-effects or negative consequences of attachment, because of the fact that attachment seems to be conducive for one's situation. Another great Indian master, Aryadeva, mentioned this very point. He said that attachment seems conducive for our wellbeing, because it has an element of bringing you together with others, and also induces some sort of pleasurable feeling.

Anger is opposite of that. Anger causes you to develop a distance from others and is uncomfortable and unpleasant. The very experience of anger is unpleasant in itself and the consequences of that makes you become further from others. It also causes mental distress. So, even from a worldly perspective, anger can be seen as a fault and a disadvantage whereas it is very difficult from a worldly perspective to see attachment as a fault because it seems to bring you a favourable situation. Aryadeva concludes that it is much more difficult for ordinary beings to see the faults of attachment.

In explaining the faults of attachment in a previous session, maybe last week but perhaps you weren't present, I mentioned that we need to be mindful that we

are not completely overwhelmed by strong attachment. Strong attachment obscures our mind and our perceptions and it may lead us to be completely reliant on the object that we are attached to. If one is totally influenced by strong attachment to the level one is completely reliant on the object that one is attached to and totally believes that that will bring one happiness and that without that object one will not be happy, then this is a recipe or cause for real distress in the future. Inevitably some separation will take place from the object and then turmoil, mental anguish and distress will be experienced. That turmoil occurs because one has not seen the faults of attachment and has totally trusted one's feelings and emotions for the object.

As I have mentioned previously, one needs to see through that and understand attachment and develop some sort of dignity within oneself and not allow one to be completely influenced by one's attachment and not totally rely on the object of attachment. It is not that being with the object of one's attachment is totally bad, it is just that we need to develop an attitude where we are not totally reliant on the object as a cause for our happiness because, as explained in the teachings, true happiness comes from within, not from the outside. That is how we train our mind.

As an ordinary being it is indeed extremely difficult to see the faults of attachment and thus we become victims of attachment. We can more readily see and understand the faults of anger because the experience of anger is not pleasant. But, as explained by the prominent Tibetan master Lama Tsong Khapa, the faults of attachment are not obvious because of the way and the depth to which that attachment takes root in our mind. The analogy he gives is of a drop of oil on paper. When you place a small drop of oil on paper it may seem that it is just a small drop but as the oil sinks into the paper it begins to spread out and it becomes almost impossible to remove the oil from the paper.

That analogy is given specifically as an analogy of how very difficult it is to separate one's mind from an object of attachment once one's attachment reaches a certain level or intensity. Just as when a drop of oil falls on a piece of paper it initially may seem like a small drop but once it starts to soak into the paper it is very difficult to separate the oil from the paper. That is an analogy that is given in the teachings.

While the faults of attachment are difficult for us to recognise, if we were to pay close attention to the causes of the problems in our life we would see that most of our problems are related to attachment. If we pay attention we can very clearly detect that almost all the faults we have arise in relation to attachment. If we were to analyse and think about it, there is every reason to understand that attachment is at fault. It is difficult, however, on our ordinary level to see that right away.

So the practical advice that I share with ordinary people is to be really cautious of intense levels of attachment and anger and to initially protect your mind from these intense levels. It is a known fact, even from a worldly perspective, that when attachment becomes intense it can cause one to experience lots of problems. So one needs to

protect one's mind from intense levels of attachment and anger.

I often share the story of how on one occasion in the past when I talked about the faults of attachment, a young lady approached me during the break and asked me, 'Geshe-la, is it true that attachment is so bad that we have to give it up completely, that we cannot have any attachment? I told her that it might be okay to keep small attachments (*laughter*). That is fine. She was extremely happy and said, 'Thank you very much for being very considerate.' (*laughter*).

At that stage, of course, to say that all attachments are a fault, and that she should give up all attachment would not have suited her mind because she was holding onto a strong belief, as many ordinary beings do, that without attachment there can't be any pleasure or happiness. Many people adhere to that view. Even some ordained monks seem to doubt whether there can be any pleasure without attachment. Later when she understood more about the teachings, she confided in me that now she understood that attachment ought to be given up. If, at that initial stage when she asked me, 'Is it true that all attachments are bad, are faults, and should be given up?' I had said, 'Yes, that is indeed true.' she would have felt completely hopeless and would not have been interested in the Buddhist teachings. She might have said, 'That is something I can't handle'. She might have given up. 'I can't practice Dharma, because I don't want to give up attachment!' (*laughter*)

At this point it is important to note that there is a difference between what we would call aspiration and attachment. Many people become confused and think that giving up attachment means giving up all desires, even the desire to be good, the desire to practice and so forth. Those are more like aspirations or a positive sort of desire, rather than something that should be given up. However, what we are talking about here is the strong attachment that causes pain and mental anguish within us if one fails to see it as a fault and completely trusts one's emotions of attachment, to the stage where one feels that one could not be separated from the object of attachment and has to be with them at all times. Then, when circumstances change and one is separated, this can cause much pain and mental anguish.

Some people have confided to me that for months, sometimes even years, they feel mental anguish because of separation. They have confided in me that even several months after separation taking place that they feel sad when they think of the other and at night when they go to sleep they cry so much the pillows becomes wet from tears. This is the extent to which mental anguish can be experienced from strong attachment. To give in and to be influenced by strong attachment can only be the cause of mental anguish. As ordinary beings we are not at a level of being where we can give up all attachments and, of course, we need a companion. We need to be with companions, friends, and a partner. For those who need to be with a partner there is some attachment involved. If, however, one can protect one's mind from very strong attachment and not to allow one's mind to be influenced by strong attachment that does not mean that one does

not enjoy the company of one's friend or companion. As an ordinary being we derive our joy from being with others and even if it does involve attachment enjoy the time that you are with them. If one does not completely give in to one's strong mind of attachment for them one will enjoy the experience of being with them. If circumstances change and one is not able to be with them one will not experience the same mental anguish and pain from that separation. That would be the ideal way to approach the situation.

So the mental anguish and suffering that is experienced from attachment arises where one does not initially allow for the possibility of separation. One doesn't leave any room for separation to take place. Totally giving in to attachment, and believing that there will be no happiness if separation takes place, is the cause to experience great suffering later if one has to separate from the other. When separation takes place the mind is not able to withstand that circumstance of separation and one experiences great suffering and pain in one's mind. To protect oneself from that and maintain dignity, one should, while enjoying the companionship of the other, remind oneself that the other person is not the ultimate source of one's happiness. Always remind oneself of that. I have other nice stories and antidotes to share about this point too.

The way to understand that this suffering is dependent on one's attitude or state of mind is to consider the fact that, when separation takes place, one of the parties may not experience great suffering. That is because they are able to give up. There is no problem for them. If the actual separation itself was the main cause of suffering the logical assumption would be that both parties would experience the same amount of suffering and mental anguish at the same time. But the fact that one experiences a lot of mental anguish and unhappiness whilst the other doesn't, shows that it is a state of mind, an attitude that one holds, rather than the actual circumstances themselves.

I usually share a story about how this suffering is dependent on one's attitude, one's state of mind. I think, however, we will save that story for another time (*Geshe-la chuckles*) instead of using up our time for the evening. That is because it is a very long story.

Actually, it might be appropriate to mention it at this time (*laughter*). The story is about a young couple. The lady was particularly close to me and would come to see me occasionally. Normally she was very joyful and happy and everything seemed okay, but one particular time she was in tears, crying a lot and really in great distress. So when I asked her, 'What is causing your distress, what happened?' she said, 'My husband left. He deserted me.' I told her in response that this was very good (*laughter*). Initially when I told her that this was actually a good situation that had occurred she might have been a little bit shocked. Then I consoled her when I said, 'Actually you have not lost anything but in fact have gained a lot. What you have gained is real freedom. What you have lost is only equal to something like rubbish, but you have gained true freedom.'

When I said that, she immediately composed herself and said, 'Actually Geshe-la, that seems quite true (*laughter*).'

Realising that maybe it was true that she had gained her freedom helped her to overcome the initial shock and grief. Relationships are a very complicated situation. While you might have some sense of security or joy from being with the other, there might also be times where you feel completely oppressed and you don't have any real sense of freedom. In fact some people have mentioned that it is actually quite boring to be with someone all the time, always having to just look at the same face. *(laughter)*

Relate to this point I recall that prior to Princess Diana having that unfortunately accident where her life was taken, someone commented that Diana may not be really happy in her relationship and having to be with just one person *(Geshe-la chuckling)* and later it seems there were problems in her relationship. She was not happy; that seems quite true. Apparently there was a personal interview with her in which she related all her problems and anguish and so forth from being with Charles. That interview was apparently viewed by many billions of people. So it seems that it is of some value to think about independence.

Some couples have confided in me that even though they are married and are committed to stay together they both enjoy certain levels of independence. They were not talking about independence to the degree of going off with other people and partners. That was not what they were describing. It was more about respecting each other's space and inclinations and wishes and what they wanted to do. Mutual respect seems to be a good element in a relationship.

There seems to be some sort of vows in a marriage. I don't know what those vows imply but it seems that maybe, sometimes, they could also be quite restrictive too. I am not sure about the implication. Apparently when those vows are made in church they are very formal and very strict vows. Do not go with anyone, talk with anyone else, be in any kind of relationship with others and so forth.

I feel that going to church and getting married is a good practice. For those who believe in God, the significance of taking the vows in the presence of God, or witnessed by God and the priest is a way to take those vows and what they entail seriously. I understand the vows are mainly to be committed to each other. So maybe it is a way to strengthen that commitment to each other. It seems like something useful. It is said that once the commitment is made, then the practice that it involves is going to be hard *(laughter)*.

It seems that I have given quite a lengthy response but that was because it was very good question with lots of depth. So I appreciate that and thank you for the question. The reason why I thank you for the question is because it was a question for which I had lot of resources and my answers fell down like rain *(laughter)*.

Before we conclude for the evening let us again take the opportunity to spend a few minutes in meditation. This time the object of our focus is the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. As we hear the sound of the mantra we try to maintain a complete focus on the sound itself and then, when the recitation stops,

we try to maintain that focus on the residue of the sound for a while and in that way it serves as an actual contemplative meditation.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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