
The Condensed Lam Rim

༄༅། །བྱང་ལྡན་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བཞུགས་སོ། །

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga
Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

1 October 2003

We can first meditate a bit as usual. Sit in a comfortable and relaxed position. After having seated yourself in a comfortable and relaxed posture, you also need to put the mind into a positive and relaxed mental state.

When we adjust both body and mind, the self can be happy. Whenever we think 'I', we are thinking about the self or 'I' that wants happiness and doesn't want suffering. Happiness is attained by subduing the body and the mind. We know that if the body and the mind are agitated and disturbed, the self can't experience any happiness. For the self to experience happiness, the body and the mind need to be subdued. Subduing the body and the mind is very important.

But then the question arises: 'If we are supposed to attain happiness by subduing the body and the mind, do external conducive conditions become unnecessary?' The answer is that we still need to have conducive external conditions. However, we are all familiar with the situation where conducive outer conditions are present, but the self still doesn't experience happiness; rather, it experiences sadness and suffering. So, we can see the significance of subduing body and mind for the self to be able to experience happiness.

To subdue the mind, one needs to meditate. Meditation is the only method for subduing the mind and the primary method for subduing the body. There are several other external methods of subduing – for example subduing an outer enemy by waging war. However, that's a different situation; it definitely doesn't apply to the mind. Also there might be certain instances where one's body could be subdued by a good beating, but that certainly doesn't apply to the mind!

There is a story about being able to subdue the body through external force but not the mind. Elephants are tamed by the use of force. They are beaten with a stick to be forced into submission and they follow the instructions given to them with the stick and hook. One day, a king went to a famous elephant tamer and asked for the tamest elephant, and then took a ride on that elephant. However, the elephant smelled a female elephant that was in heat, so it started to run around like crazy with the king still on its back looking for the female elephant. The king thought he would die because the elephant was so crazed.

Anyway, when the king finally managed to get the elephant back, he complained to the elephant tamer: 'I asked you to give me a really, really tame elephant, but you gave me one that was completely untamed'. The elephant tamer replied; 'Look, I'm really sorry, but all I

can do is exert some physical control over the elephant's body. I can't subdue the elephant's mind. But look now – the elephant's desire and attachment has subsided, and he's completely tame'.

So he showed the king all the things the elephant was trained to do and showed how tame it was now that the mind of desire had subsided. Then the king asked the elephant tamer: 'So where could one find a person who is proficient in subduing sentient beings' minds?' The elephant tamer said: 'There is this a person called Shakyamuni Buddha who is very skilful in doing that'.

This is a good story for parents with teenage sons to contemplate. When the son's mind becomes stirred up by desire and he starts chasing girls, the parents know that he's really a little bit crazy in his mind at that time! We have to always relate the moral of those stories to our own mind and our own situation. We know there are situations when our mind or another person's mind is completely overcome by disturbing thoughts and there's nothing that person can do at that moment. They just can't help themselves; they just have to act in that manner. Understanding the other person's situation at that time can be very helpful.

This story also shows that one cannot subdue the mind by subduing the body. For example, parents might place their [girl-crazy] son under a type of 'house arrest', but this would only physically restrain the boy – it would not help him with his mental state. Likewise, police can handcuff a criminal, but that doesn't change anything in the mental state of the person.

You can see the significance of subduing the mind with meditation, because if it is not subdued, it will be overcome by disturbing mental states and become agitated. This will also have a negative effect on others with whom we come into contact; their minds also become disturbed and agitated. This in turn will further agitate our mind, disturbing others' minds, and so on, back and forth.

One should think that it is very important to have a peaceful mind that is not under the control of the disturbing thoughts. To attain such a peaceful mind, one needs to meditate. So, now we need to let go of those those agitated, disturbed and unhappy mental states. We need to withdraw the mind from those objects that cause it to be in such a state and instead focus it internally.

After having focused the mind internally, it needs to have an object of meditation, so you place it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. Then meditate for a few minutes on the coming and going of the breath. It is really important that one meditates properly, even if just for one minute. We must really be able to completely focus the mind internally, removing it from the disturbing objects, and placing it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. Even if one is able to do that just for a minute properly, it is good enough. Over time, we can extend the duration to two minutes and so forth. (*Pause for meditation.*)

You should try to achieve such a peaceful, soft, happy

and stable mental state. If the mind is stable, there are various benefits. For example, if one is studying, one will be able to study much better with a stable mind. Then, after having finished one's study, one will be able to sleep well. In the morning when one wakes up, one's mind will be fresh and clear. So there are many benefits to be gained.

3.2.3. How to think and act when teaching

Previously, we talked about the mental state with which the Dharma should be taught. Now, we come to the correct physical actions for teaching the Dharma. When one is getting ready to teach, first one should have a wash, clean oneself, dress well and sit on a throne. Before sitting on the throne, one must make three prostrations to the merit field – one visualises all the Buddhas and lineage lamas, and then visualises all the lineage Lamas absorbing one into each other as one makes their prostrations until the final lineage Lama absorbs into oneself.

As one seats oneself on the throne, one snaps one's fingers and meditates on impermanence in order to counteract pride. One should teach the Dharma with a clear and smiling expression. There are certain lamas who might teach the Dharma wrathfully, with a black look and frowning face, perhaps even having a stick in their hand to prod the disciples, as in the Zen tradition where one gets hit if one falls asleep. In different situations, lamas can assume such an aspect to subdue individual disciples, but I don't think that would work very well here! (*Laughter*)

So, one should teach the Dharma with a clear and smiling face and teach with the help of analogies, logic and quotations to convey the meaning. All the logical reasons one uses should be supported by quotations from the scriptures. In the monastery, when the monks debate, they analyse the Dharma with logic and the logic they use to support their point of view is further supported by quotations. However, if one were to just posit quotations and without logic, it wouldn't be worthwhile. So one needs to use logic supported by quotations.

One needs to teach the Dharma without mixing up the outlines, chapters or sequence of the teachings. One must teach following the correct sequence so the teachings can enter the student's mind in the appropriate sequence and not make the student confused. One shouldn't teach the Dharma in the way a crow builds its nest. When a crow builds its nest, it takes a piece of wood from here, a twig from there, etc. When you look at the nest, it doesn't look like a properly constructed structure, but is all over the place. Similarly, one needs to teach the Dharma in the proper methodical sequence without mixing up the outlines.

Also, one shouldn't teach the Dharma in the way an old person might eat. When some old people eat, they pick out only the soft things that are easy to chew, but they won't eat the tougher pieces of meat. That's not how one should teach the Dharma – one shouldn't just teach the easy parts of the Dharma and leave out the difficult points.

Neither should one teach the Dharma in an approximate way, not having properly understood the points that one is teaching. One should not say: 'It is probably like this' or 'Maybe it's like that', because one would be teaching the Dharma like a blind person finding their way with a stick. Rather, one should understand well the points one is teaching; if one understands well the points one is teaching, it won't matter if students pose some smart questions.

One shouldn't teach the Dharma without being requested to. There are exceptions – for example, if one investigates a student and sees that the student is ready, one can teach the Dharma without having been requested to do so. If the student is a qualified vessel that is ready to receive the teachings, one can teach the Dharma without waiting to be requested. But generally, one can't teach the Dharma without first being requested to.

3.3. The common things to do after the conclusion of the teaching

Now we have completed the outlines of how to listen to the Dharma and how to teach the Dharma. Next comes the outline of what both the students and the teacher should do at the conclusion of the teaching. The merits or roots of virtue created by listening to the Dharma and teaching the Dharma have to be dedicated. If one listens to the Dharma in the appropriate way and one teaches the Dharma in the appropriate way, a lot of merit is created, which then has to be dedicated. If one listens to the Dharma in the appropriate way and teaches the Dharma in the appropriate way, the obscuring karma one has created previously by being disrespectful to the Dharma and the Dharma teacher are purified. Also, one will be protected from creating those karmas again.

If one doesn't listen to the Dharma teachings in the appropriate manner or doesn't teach the Dharma in the appropriate manner, then listening to the Dharma or teaching the Dharma actually becomes a cause for increasing delusions such as pride. This can happen from the side of the students and from the side of the teacher – teaching the Dharma or listening to the Dharma in an unskilful way becomes a like a Mara [demon] that harms oneself. Therefore, one should always be aware of the significant points of listening to and teaching the Dharma appropriately, and should then follow them.

4. How to guide the disciples with the actual instructions

4.1. The root of the path - proper reliance on the spiritual friend

Now, we come to the fourth major outline – the actual instructions for the students. The first sub-outline here is the proper way of relying upon the spiritual teacher, which is the root of the path, and the next is how to train one's mind having after having a proper relation with a spiritual friend. So now we have gone through the benefits of listening to the Dharma and the qualities that must be possessed by those who listen to the Dharma and those who explain the Dharma. It is very clearly laid out. If both come together – a qualified teacher who possesses all the qualities of a qualified teacher, and a suitable

student who has all the characteristics of being a proper vessel – then that relationship can be very fruitful.

We will continue with that next week. Do you have some questions?

Question: You spoke about good ways to teach the Dharma. Do you have any advice on how to teach children; given there are so many people in power throughout the world who are not good examples for them?

Answer: You have to teach small children in a very gentle way. For example, I tell small children not to harm insects, telling them that when they harm insects, it causes pain for the insect. Then I might pinch the child a little bit, saying: 'That's hurtful for you, so it is similar for the insect. When one hurts the insect, it causes a similar feeling for the insect'.

Also, I think it might be useful to teach small children by doing drawings. For example, you could draw two areas on a piece of paper, which you could say are like two countries. There's the good side or good country and a bad one. Then you explain that there are children on the bottom of the good side and other children on the bottom of the bad side or the harmful side. Then you can show their respective developments. You could show the children on the good side end up with a good life, enough to eat, enough friends, living in comfort and harmony, and so forth. Then you can say how they got there was by listening well to the parents, not harming others, being good children, being helpful, and so forth.

You could then explain that those that went down the harmful direction ended up without enough to eat, enough to drink, no friends, without no good circumstances, etc. and that they arrived there by acting in a harmful and destructive manner, by not listening to their parents, and so forth. You could add that maybe the children who went down in a harmful direction didn't have a good relationship with their parents, so the parents weren't able to teach them properly, or maybe they didn't listen to their parents. The children who went up the good side, on the other hand, had a good relationship with their parents and were taught well by the parents and listened well to the parents.

This sort of visual aid makes it easy for the children to generate a mental image of what one is talking about.

Also, children are very influenced by their parents. If the parents act in a wholesome, positive, pure manner, this influences the children to act likewise. I think also that using this technique has also proved useful during the Sunday children's group.

If the parents treat each other well – if the husband treats the wife in a gentle manner, and the wife treats the husband likewise, and they talk to each other kindly, respectfully and honestly, this will educate the child to behave likewise.

Otherwise, if the mother always fights with the father or the father always fights with the mother, you can see that makes an imprint on the child to act likewise when it grows up. When this girl becomes a woman, maybe she

will have a tendency to always fight with her husband; or if it was a boy, as a man he might have a tendency to always fight with his wife and mistreat her. We don't know if it always comes from the parents 100%, but there definitely seems to be some influence.

Question: When children receive the Dharma teachings, how should one apply the four reliances to the role of the teacher?

Answer: When we explain the Dharma to our children, it is a different relationship from that of a disciple and Dharma teacher.

First, the child is not yet developed, and cannot take the role of a disciple. Also, the child might not comprehend the four reliances – not relying on the person but on the words; not relying on the words but on their meaning; not relying on the mistaken consciousnesses but relying on the more subtle undistorted consciousnesses; and so forth. These are a bit difficult for the child – for example, if we say 'not relying on the person but relying on the words', it means of course that we should not worry so much about what the person is like, but on what the person is saying that will be of help to us. But that's also difficult. Many people like to rely on the person as well. So, the person needs to be also properly developed from his or her own side.

It can be good to teach a child, for example, how to do circumambulations, how to do offerings, how to do prostrations, and so forth. The child will become acquainted with doing these actions. He or she might not yet comprehend the meaning of the actions, but as they grow up and their mind becomes a little bit subdued, they can receive further teachings and comprehend the meaning and then realise: 'Ah, that's why I've been doing it like that', etc.

If the child becomes familiar with certain pure things and pure ways of acting, that can prove very fruitful later in the child's life. Teaching meditation to a child may be very difficult – their minds are very restless and distracted and it might be difficult at an early age. To do those other things, however, is very useful.

There is grandmother that does things like recite Tara praises, make offerings to Tara and do prostrations to Tara. But then one of the grandchildren asked: 'So one does all those things like prostrations and offerings for Tara, but what is Tara doing, what is the Buddha doing?' In such a situation, if one explains to the child that he or she will receive blessings in the mind, which then will benefit them later in life, improve the mind, help them in their study at school, etc. the child will be happy to hear such an explanation.

Question: A dear friend is about to have a baby in a few weeks, and I hope to be there. Are there any practices I can do or am I getting confused about how my practice can benefit others?

Answer: No – reciting prayers and mantras can be beneficial for that mother and child.

For example, reciting the Tara mantra Shakyamuni Buddha's mantra will protect the mother and child.

Sometimes during birth something might happen to the mother; sometimes it will happen to the child. So, to protect the mother and child from any harm during birth, it can be beneficial to recite those mantras.

When the mother is going through her labour pains, you can sit there, recite mantras, and meditate away. You can tell the mother that if she places her faith completely in you, nothing bad will happen. *(Laughter)* Then, after the successful birth, the mother will really generate some conviction in what you did! She will think: 'There really was something to it because it all went very well.' *(More laughter)*

I know of one mother who was present when her daughter gave birth. When the child was delivered, it wasn't breathing, so the grandmother immediately recited some Tara mantras, upon which the child started to breathe. The grandmother was a practitioner of Tara, having recited many Tara praises and mantras, so she accredited Tara with the child's being able to start breathing.

As was explained at the beginning, bring the mind back home, focusing it internally, then placing it single-pointedly on the sound of the name mantra of the Buddha.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

Transcribed from tape by Gabrielle Thomson

Edit 1 by Mary-Lou Considine

Edit 2 by Venerable Tenzin Dongak

Edited Version

© **Tara Institute**