
The Condensed Lam Rim

༄༅། །བྱང་ལྡན་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བཞུགས་སོ། །

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

5 July 2006

As usual, it's good to spend a few minutes in meditation. Sit in a comfortable position. Keeping the mind unwaveringly focused on an object such as the breath and familiarising the mind with that object is what is called meditation.

One needs to consider the purpose and the results of keeping the mind focused on a single object, a chosen object for meditation. Some may actually misunderstand that explanation of having to keep the mind focused on one single object. Does that mean that one shouldn't be thinking about anything else? Should one try to be focused on one single object all the time and nothing else? If one comes to that conclusion it is, of course, a misunderstanding.

One keeps the mind focused on one single object for the duration that you are engaged in some particular activity such as meditation. Keeping the mind focused on that particular object is how one is training the mind to keep focused. When one has trained the mind to be focused on a single object one will then be able to focus 100% on an object, whatever object it may be. This means that the results one wishes to achieve in relation to the object will be accomplished. When we think about it in ordinary terms, if the mind is very distracted and thinking about everything else except what one should be doing the result, even in mundane activities, is not as effective as it could be. We don't accomplish what we want to achieve if the mind is very distracted. That being the case with even mundane, worldly activities, it is even more so in spiritual or Dharma activities. If the mind is completely distracted and not focused it is very hard to achieve what we wish to achieve.

If you come down to the main purpose of meditation, and in this regard it means keeping the mind focused on a virtuous object, we find that it's very important to keep the mind focused if we wish to accomplish what we need to achieve. We may ask the question, "Why do we need to keep the mind focused? What is the main purpose and what is it that one wishes to achieve?" The obvious answer is that we want to achieve a happy state of mind. What we wish for is to be happy.

If we can be happy regardless of the mind being focused or not, we might not need to put any effort into having focused mind. Everything would be fine, everything would be well. But we find that in life there are many situations where we are not happy. Things are not right. Things go wrong. We are often not happy about many different things, but mainly because we don't accomplish what we wish to achieve; mundane or what we seek from

Dharma practice. We experience a lot of disappointment and our mind becomes unhappy if we don't achieve what we wish to achieve.

Long-term happiness is, of course, our goal. Meanwhile, as we strive in our normal day to day activities, it becomes very important to have some sort of wellbeing, a stable mind that is not too distraught and not too overwhelmed by the situations which happen in life. If we can stabilise our mind and make our mind quite focused through meditation it makes the mind quite firm and stable to the point where it is not as influenced by external factors. Even when things do go a bit wrong, if one has trained one's mind in meditation, it allows the mind to remain stable and not swayed by the external mishaps.

It is natural that things go wrong from time to time, for us ordinary beings in samsara. Things will not always go according to our wishes, especially when it is in relation to external conditions. Many things can go wrong. This does not only apply to a lowly person. From high status to low status, whether you have a good degree and knowledge, whether you have a high status in the field you are working in, from the very high to the low, everyone experiences, from time to time, things going wrong and things being unfavourable in their life.

We find, however, that training and meditation keeping the mind focused, especially on the virtuous frame of mind, helps the mind to become stable. Thus one is not overwhelmed by external circumstances sometimes going wrong or not being too favourable. It stops the mind being depressed by external things. That is the benefit we can find.

When the mind is distracted, when there is lack of focus in the mind, it becomes disturbed. That then brings about unfavourable experiences such as frustration and all the rest. If we look at this at a broader level, in more mundane, day-to-day activity, we can see examples of the disadvantages of the mind not being focused. This occurs in a relationship. If there's a mutually beneficial, good relationship between two people that brings a certain amount of stability, wellbeing and happiness into the relationship. We can call it temporary happiness, but nevertheless it is some sort of wellbeing in that relationship. However, if the mind is not focused on maintaining that relationship then there will naturally be problems in the relationship. There will be things that go wrong and, as a result, the mind will be disturbed and that disturbance just expands the distance in the relationship and as a result more and more problems arise. That is an experience that many would have had. When we look into the broader sense, we can definitely see the disadvantages, even in our day to day living, that arise if the mind is distracted and not focused on what one is engaging in. Then, as a result, the mind becomes very disturbed and it brings about more problems.

When we look into the real source or cause for the disturbance of the mind the teachings will explain the main cause as the grasping to the self. The distorted mind that grasps to an inherently existing self, is the main

cause of our problems. That, of course, is true, but it is hard for us, on our ordinary level, to understand the distorted state of mind of self-grasping. However if we can say that in a broad sense, the distracted mind is the source of our problems. That is something that we can relate to quite easily. We can see in our day-to-day experiences that a distracted mind definitely brings what we call unhappiness into one's situation.

Now the reason why the mind is unfocused and distracted is because one doesn't understand the consequences of what we call the distractions and so forth. If we look for the causes of distraction we find ignorance, not knowing. Ignorance is then based on attachment, attachment to temporary, fleeting pleasures or ideas that attract the mind and make it distracted. Therefore the underlying factor is attachment. We can see that there's attachment there, which is based on ignorance. When we investigate the distracted mind further, this is something we come to see.

One of the immediate disadvantages of a disturbed mind is, not being able to sleep at night. People who find difficulty in going to sleep, who suffer from insomnia, are people who have many things on their mind. They are distracted by so many thoughts that they are not able to bring those thoughts in control and have a centred mind. Because the mind is so busy it completely takes up one's time and one loses one's sleep. Now sleep is something that is actually very important for our body, where it gives a rest to the body. If we cannot sleep well at night that leads to many other problems. You see we find that losing sleep, though there might be many other related problems, is basically the result of having a very disturbed mind.

So we come to the question, "What is the mind disturbed by?" By many conceptual thoughts. In Tibetan this is called *nam-tok*. *Nam-tok* is translated as conceptual thoughts. It refers to all sorts of running, fleeting, paranoid thoughts that are without real essence but are completely distracting. All of that is summed up in the Tibetan word is *nam-tok*. We can see from the obvious disadvantages in our daily life, such as losing sleep, that it is very important to have a settled, subdued, calm mind. The causes of a calm mind are, again, a focused mind and the way to have a focused mind is training and meditation on a regular basis. In this way we can see also the practical benefits.

To explain the causes of the disturbed mind further. Earlier we mentioned conceptual thoughts. More specifically it is what we call in Tibetan '*nam-tok rag-pa*. *Rag-pa* has the connotation of 'gross', so gross conceptual thoughts. This has a connotation that are very mundane conceptual thoughts. So gross conceptual thoughts, *nam-tok rag-pa*, are what disturb the mind. All sort of different thoughts and ideas, paranoia, frustration and all the disturbing thoughts that arise in the mind, are summed up by *nam-tok rag-pa* or gross conceptual thoughts.

To settle down the mind is one of the immediate ways, the antidotes, to overcome the disturbances in the mind, to overcome the gross conceptual thoughts in the mind.

One settles down the mind through choosing a virtuous object and focussing the mind on that virtuous object; or a neutral object such as the breath.

It is very important for us to identify and acknowledge that we have resources within ourselves. This is something very important which I emphasise again and again to people. These resources are not something that we have to look for outside and try to find or purchase. They are within us. The means to overcome our own disturbed mind is within us. Of course there are circumstances where we may not have the full capacity to overcome our disturbing thoughts right away, but that doesn't mean that we don't have the potential within ourselves. We do. We have the potential and the resources within ourselves and it's a matter of recognising this and then using those resources. It is definitely the case that we have the potential and the resources within ourselves to overcome our own disturbing mind and, to be more specific, overcome the gross conceptual thoughts. Therefore, to tap into those resources within oneself and use them efficiently is very, very important. It something within our capacity and that is why we are emphasising the need and importance of meditation.

This explanation of the importance of meditation as well as the disadvantages or faults of not meditating, and the obstacles to meditation, are all explained in detail as it helps to overcome all the doubts one may have when one starts to engage in meditation. Before we go into meditation we should be quite certain and sure why we're doing it. Most importantly we should know that we have the ability to do the meditation, the purpose of meditation and how great benefits are. That is why we keep talking about the faults, the disadvantages, plus the advantages of meditation.

Now to actually spend some time in meditation. We are focusing here on the breath which is a neutral object. As we focus on the breath, as we single out in our mind to be completely focused on the breath, that naturally and automatically separates the mind from the normal distractions in the mind. The distractions are, as mentioned earlier, what we call the conceptual thoughts that arise in the mind. Normally they just randomly come up one after another. As we keep the mind focused on the breath, it allows the mind to be separated or taken away from the influence of these conceptual, random thoughts.

As we attempt to keep the mind focused on the breath in a natural way, and as we focus on the breath single-pointedly, you will notice the mind becomes settled, calmer and more peaceful. Even a very few moments experience of that can give us a taste of how the mind would be really happy, content and peaceful if it were to be settled and calm all the time. We are training our mind to be focused. Maintaining that focus even for a short time helps to familiarise the mind with that state. To again emphasise. The reason the mind becomes calm and peaceful is because we are separating our mind from the distractions that are the conceptual thoughts. We can now spend a few moments keeping our mind focused on the breath. *Pause for meditation.*

4.2.2.1.2 The actual way to take the essence

4.2.2.1.2.1 Training the mind in the stages of the path of the small capable being

4.2.2.1.2.1.1 The actual way of training in the motivation common to the being of small capacity

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.2 Relying on the methods for achieving happiness in future lives

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.2.1 Developing the faith of conviction in karma and its effects.

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.2.1.1 Thinking about the Law of Cause and Effect in general

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.2.1.1.2 Reflecting on the individual divisions

Of the ten non-virtues, we have discussed explanations of the three non-virtues of the physical body and the four non-virtues of speech. We have come to the last three non-virtues; the three mental non-virtues. The three mental non-virtues are covetousness, malice or ill will, and wrong views.

Covetousness is actually in the nature of attachment. There are four conditions for covetousness to be a full path of negative karma. The first is basis, and the basis of covetousness is the wealth or possessions of another person or being. There are three aspects of the attitude. The first aspect of the attitude is to have the right perception of the basis, whatever basis it is. The affliction can be any of the three poisons. The motivation is a desire to have for oneself the wealth or property of someone else.

The performance, which is the second condition, is striving at the contemplated purpose, meaning making the mind go towards that object. That actual mind of going towards that object and thinking specifically about wishing to own that object is the actual performance.

The culmination is generating the thought, "May that object become mine", and generating the strong wish that, "May it become mine. May it belong to me". When one generates that thought, that is the culmination.

The next non-virtue of mind is malice or ill will. In order for that to be a complete negative karma off ill will or malice, there needs to be four conditions, the first being the basis. The basis is another being who appears to be unattractive to oneself and one has feelings of hostility towards that being. When we look into this explanation of a being who is unattractive, it is definitely the case if we see an unattractive person that there is naturally the beginning of ill will. Even the feeling of aversion towards that object, that person or being, is the beginning of ill will. It is actually the exact opposite of an object towards which one has attachment. An object of attachment is an object that is attractive to one. It is actually interesting when we look into how our mind functions. The very same object can be an object of attraction and therefore appear attractive, but it can then later turn into an unattractive object that we develop hostility or ill will towards. The one object can be at one time an object of attachment and when attachment is felt towards that

object it appears to be nice. One wants to be near the object and one has a sort of comfortable, nice feeling based on attachment. It's not very stable and it's false but, nevertheless, one has a comfortable sensation about being with the object, because it appears attractive. But as soon as the object appears to be unattractive, for whatever reason, then ill will starts to form in one's mind. A harmful intention starts to develop in the mind. Both are based on ignorance. Attachment towards an object or the opposite, which is an aversion, are both based on ignorance. Therefore the underlying delusion or affliction is actually ignorance. That is how we say that ignorance is the basis of all the delusions. The discrimination or perception is knowing the object that one has that feeling towards. The affliction can be all three delusions.

The motivation, which is the third of the attitudes, can arrive as a result of having malice or ill will. Another term for this can be harmful intention towards an object. Thoughts might arise in the mind such as, "How nice it would be if they were killed or if they were bound or their resources were destroyed, either naturally or by another person". These sorts of thoughts may arise in relation to an object that one feels hostile towards. These thoughts may not arise immediately in the mind but, as a result of ill will, if one feels aversion towards an object there's an underlying feeling that if something unfortunate happens to them one would feel good about it. One would feel happy and good that something bad is happening to the object one disagrees with and feels hostile towards.

Therefore it is very important that we guard our mind from harmful intention. As mentioned earlier, ill will or malice may be developed towards an object that one previously has been attracted towards. I usually advise people that one must be very careful in a relationship. In a relationship the object that you are having a relationship with starts off as an object of attraction. If one is not careful then that very object, because it is an object of attraction, when the slightest thing goes wrong it may start to become an object which is unattractive. As soon as that object starts to seem unattractive other sorts of thoughts may start to arise in the mind wishing that things may go wrong for them and then it get worse. One must be very careful and guard oneself.

The performance is having that thought and the culmination is where one develops the determination or the decision to do these things oneself or the wish these things may be performed by someone else. The culmination basically is the heightened decision. Ill-will starts from just a slight uncomfortable feeling towards others and when that escalates it can turn into what we call actual harmful intention or malice. This is the thought that some mishap may happen towards them such as killing, "May they be killed." and so forth. When one reaches a certain heightened state of ill will the culmination of ill-will is when one makes a decision in one's mind that, "I definitely want something bad to happen to them." When one reaches that state of mind there's nothing to stop one from actually doing the action. Whatever action or mishap one wants to happen

for the other is followed by the culmination of the ill will or the malice in one's mind.

At this stage, does anyone have questions?

Question: If a grasping thought is let out, (arises in the mind), can you purify it immediately? Answer : If one immediately recognises it as a harmful thought that already helps to purify it. More specifically, it is mentioned in the teachings that if one generates regret towards an ill deed, that regret purifies half of the negative karma. Just having regret in one's mind already helps to purify the negative karma of ill will.

One can generate the thought, "This is not proper, it is not right for me to have these thoughts about harming the other. They are just like me. They also want to be happy, do not like any harm. Just as I would not wish to experience any harm upon myself they do not wish that experience. Therefore it is not proper or right for me to voluntarily engage in harming the other. Instead of harming the other I should try to benefit or help them. At the very least I should definitely not harm the other and try to develop some compassion towards them." In that case there's no question that even if there was ill will in the beginning, it will definitely be purified.

Question: How may our intimate relations (sexual relationships) be part of our practice? ie the function of intimate relations as part of our practice. Answer : It can benefit, it can help. That relationship can definitely help a spiritual life. A general definition of Dharma, which is equivalent to spiritual practice, according to Buddhist descriptions is to benefit others as much as one can and, at the very least, not to harm others. The practice of benefiting others, helping others, and purposefully and voluntarily avoiding harming others would constitute a spiritual practice, a Dharma practice. What one strives to do in an intimate relationship is to make the other happy. One looks into what can really make the other happy, going beyond the mundane happiness and looking into, "How can I help the other?" Even if it's just one person, one really puts one's effort and striving into make the other happy and avoiding making them unhappy; minimising the things that would make them unhappy. That process of putting effort into making the other happy and avoiding making them unhappy would be a practice of Dharma, a spiritual practice. If we can train with one person in really trying to provide them some happiness and avoid harming them in any way, then through that sort of training we can train our mind to go further and that one relationship will become strengthened and a good relationship, a mutually beneficial relationship, where one is basically enhancing each other's practices to further develop.

There is a Tibetan saying about how a relationship should be maintained. "We shall be happy together when there are happy times and sad together when there are sad times." That's how you should maintain the relationship. The Tibetan term for union means having a combined resource. It means that even if things go well, we are together, and if things even don't go well we're still together.

Those two terms, which are used in mundane situations actually have a Dharma connotation because that part which says, "We shall be happy together when there are happy times" indicates an underlying unconditional Love. "We shall be sad together when there are sad times" shows the aspect of compassion, which says that may we be together even when there is suffering.

In a mutual relationship you make a mental decision to really care for a person, to make them as happy as possible and if there's any discomfort and any unease on the other side you try to help relieve that unease. In western countries when people get married, there's that oath that one has to take, an oath that they will stay together to the end of ... whatever the

oath is (*laughter*).

If you are getting married by a priest the oath or promise is usually done in a church. Even though no-one has given me this explanation, I interpret it as being a really sacred promise that people are taking; a sacred oath or promise people are making when they are committing to each other. Because it's sacred it has to be done in a sacred place such as a church or a temple. This shows to me that it is an attempt to go beyond the normal worldly attractions in really caring for each other. As a Christian the main witness to that oath or promise would be Christ or God. Therefore it is done in a church and that's what I feel is the significance of having marriage ceremonies done in a church.

Question: What advice would you give to a person who wants to study Dharma more seriously but is afraid of what opportunities he will have to give up or will miss as a result. Answer: If one has a fear or reservation of that nature it means that one is not yet really ready to completely engage in Dharma practice. In that case, if one has some sort of reservation or fear, it is better not to give up whatever it seems needs to be given up. If one does not have the full capacity to give that up it is better not to give it up because one would face much more difficulties and problems later. In one's practice there will come a time when there is no question in one's mind, there's no doubt in one's mind. It would not be, from the point of view of the person's practice, giving up the worldly things. It would be just something very natural that they would do. They would choose to do it. There would be no problem, there would be no hesitation in the mind. Until one reaches that point, it is better to maintain a realistic approach.

Even though one may have an interest in practising Dharma, and one may have quite a genuine wish, if there's some reservation and some fear it shows that that person is not completely ready yet. That's an indication in itself; if there's some reservation it is an indication that one is not really ready. Therefore the advice would be don't give up whatever you feel that you are going to give up right away. Continue with your practice in the way that you can handle it.

It should be understood that developing disgust towards objects and things and situations does not mean giving up the things completely and abandoning them. What it means is giving up the attachment towards objects and situations. One is striving to give up the attachment to the objects rather than the things or objects themselves. That should be understood because there's often a misunderstanding or misinterpretation about that.

The Dharma term is, "Have less desires and generate contentment". If that term 'less desires and have contentment' is misunderstood or misinterpreted, a feeling may arise that having less desires and being content means that I should not have many objects, I should eat very little and very poorly and I should wear ragged clothes. That sort of idea creates a reservation and uncomfortable feeling in one's mind, "Oh, I don't think I can live like that". But that is not what "having less desires, generate contentment" really means. As mentioned earlier, it means giving up an attachment towards objects.

We will conclude for this evening with the meditation and focus on the mantra of Buddha Shakyamuni. We shall sit again in a comfortable position and maintain our focus on the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

Transcribed from tape by Gabrielle Thomson

Edit 1 by John Burch

Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

