
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

12 July 2006

As usual we will spend some time doing meditation. Sit in an upright but comfortable position for meditation.

The definition of meditation is to keep the mind focused unwaveringly on a chosen object, maintaining that focus on the object without distraction.

Meditation can be contemplative or analytical. For both contemplative and analytical meditation, we keep the mind focused on an object. The difference between contemplative and analytical meditation is that with contemplative meditation, we choose only one object and keep the mind focused on nothing but this object for duration of the meditation. With analytical meditation, however, we need to focus the mind but not on one particular object for the duration of the meditation. It doesn't have to be single-pointed focus on only one object; rather, we keep the mind focused on the object being analysed then, when the analysis is complete, we move onto another topic and spend some time analysing that particular object. In such a systematic way, we maintain our focus without distraction not just on a single object, but rather on various topics.

The main objective of either analytical or contemplative meditation is to bring the mind inward and free it from worldly distractions and disturbing conceptual thoughts, maintaining that inner focus to allow the mind to settle within us. The opposite of this would be a mind distracted by the continual arising of disturbing, gross conceptual thoughts.

As we have said before, if the mind were to be happy and content with distractions, that would be fine. In that case, we would not need to worry too much about meditation. However, as we have found through our experience, the more disturbed the mind is, the more unhappy and agitated it becomes. We lose our focus, our direction in life. This is where all our problems in life can be traced to – all our problems in life can basically be traced to a distracted mind.

Therefore, as we all wish to have a happy and settled mind, it is crucial that we have a focused mind, a mind that can focus inwardly. This will be achieved not over the course of a few sessions, or a few days or weeks, but rather through a continual, determined effort over a long time. In this very gradual way, we can start to achieve mental stability and inner focus. When the mind is stabilised, it will not be easily disturbed by the worldly conceptions and will be more settled and happy.

It is important for us to be realistic from the outset with our meditation and to begin with meditation sessions of

short duration. We should not be over-zealous and over-ambitious in our meditation in the beginning. We can get so excited when we hear about the benefits of meditation that we can overdo it, over-zealously putting a lot of time into meditation. Then it is very easy for us to give up.

The realistic approach is to spend a short time in meditation at the start. Even if we feel we could do it longer, it's important just to maintain that routine of meditating for a very short time and continuing that. It is the continuity of the meditation rather than the length of time that is important. So from the very beginning, we should decide to do meditation for a short period and be settled and happy with doing that on a continual basis, then gradually build it up. This is a more stable and realistic approach to gaining results from our meditation.

The result of regular, continual meditation in our daily life will be that we will have a more stable mind, in the sense that it isn't vulnerable to feeling frustrated, sad or agitated when things go wrong. There may still be external causes for disturbance but, because the mind has reached a stable state through continual practices, it will remain calm and strong and firm. This firm and stable mind will become like our best friend, a companion that we can rely upon, particularly during difficult times. It will be our saviour when we are facing hardships and difficulties in life.

Normally when things go wrong, our mind as the tendency to blow the problem up out of proportion; we become completely overwhelmed and emotionally affected by the external disturbance because the mind is not stable and is easily influenced. If the mind has been trained, however, it will remain unwaveringly stable, even in the face of difficulties. When we have this stability within our mind, it is a real saviour, a real protector that is with us at all times. This is one of the results of meditation.

We have to become friends with our own mind, not keep it at a distance. Befriending the mind means getting to know the mind, looking into it and working with it. And as you would with a good friend, you should start liking the mind so that you can work with it, by improving the stability of the mind.

Even though our mind is within us and not outside somewhere else, our attitude to training the mind is normally that we keep it at a distance; we don't really consider it as being of the utmost importance to us. But if we were to really befriend our mind, to keep looking into the attitudes that occur in the mind, we will get to know the mind and be able to control it.

So while we are talking about befriending the mind, we will now take some time to actually use our mind to focus on our breath, using the breath as an object of our meditation. We make the decision that for the next few minutes, we will maintain our focus on the breath, not allowing other internal or external distractions to disturb our focus but keeping the mind 100% focused on the breath and maintaining that for a few minutes. Again sit in a comfortable upright position for meditation and focus 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 the mind 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 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

Following from our last session, within the ten non-virtues we have covered the first nine. The tenth non-virtue to be explained is what is called wrong view.

For a full path of negative karma of wrong view to take place, four conditions must be present, the first being the **basis**. The basis of a wrong view is an existent object, because wrong view here means the denial of existent objects, the denial of something which exists.

The first of the three aspects of the **attitude** is the perception, which is the denial of the existence of an existent object. This means having a correct perception of the object that one is denying. For example, the three jewels in Buddhism is an existent object, so perceiving the three jewels as the object to be denied is what is called the perception. The second aspect, the affliction or delusion, can be all three delusions. The third aspect, the motivation, is the desire to deny the existence of an existent object.

The **performance** or the action is initiation of that attitude. The **culmination** is where having voluntarily decided to generate denial in one's mind of an existent object, relishes that denial.

Now we come to the differences or distinctions between the ten non-virtues. Within the ten non-virtues, the seven non-virtuous actions of body and speech are not only actions (karma), but are also paths of action, or what we call paths of karma. The three mental non-virtues such as covetousness, however, are paths of action but are not actions.

The text says here that intentions are actions, yet they are not paths of action. What this means is that where there is a mere mental intention to engage in action, but the action has not yet been engaged in – such as when one has the mere thought of killing or stealing – while the mere thought or intention makes the mind go towards that action, it is still at the mere level of thought. At that stage, it is called an action or karma, but it is not a path of action or path of karma because whatever was intended to be done is not yet the basis for that. It is just a mere intention. So it is not a path of action or path of karma.

To make it clear, when a thought arises in the mind to do a negative action, whatever action it may be, at the time the thought arises in the mind, a mental state technically called the mental factor of intention, takes place. The

mental intention arising at the time of the mere thought is what is called karma but it is not the path of karma. Examples of both a karma and a path of karma are each of the seven non-virtuous actions of body and speech. They are not only actions or karmas, they are also paths of karma. They are paths of karma because the actions of body and speech are the basis of the intended operation. 'The basis of the intended operation' means that whatever the negative thought may have been initially to do something – for example killing or stealing – when one actually engages in that action, that is the basis for the intended motivation one had earlier. That's how it becomes a path of action as well.

The three mental non-virtues – covetousness, ill will and wrong views – are said to be paths of action. They are paths of actions because they are the basis of the intended operation; however they are not actions or karma themselves because they are delusions by nature. According to the textual explanation, a delusion and a karma are mutually exclusive. They are actually separate entities. Therefore, because the three mental negativities are actual delusions by nature, they are not karma.

As I interpret it, the reason why delusions and karma are said to be mutually exclusive is because a delusion is a wrong perception, a wrong consciousness, whereas a karma is more neutral. If it's a negative karma, of course it is negative and wrong; however, there can also be virtuous karmas. So it depends on what kind of karma is initiated. However, delusions are always based on a wrong conception.

To explain further, karma is dependent on what kind of action one takes: initially it is an intention, and depending on what kind of action one wishes to take, it can be either virtuous or non-virtuous. Therefore it is dependent on what kind of action one follows. Whereas a delusion from the very beginning is a faulty state of mind that exaggerates the qualities and faults of an object being focused on.

Any questions at this stage?

Question. Sometimes I exaggerate the faults of others and I wonder how you overcome that judgmental assessment of other people?

Answer: If you saw someone with a long nose, the mere thought "that person has a long nose" may not be an exaggeration; that in itself may not be a judgmental thought. Observing something that is a fact is not a judgmental thought. If you saw someone without a nose and thought "they don't have a nose" that is also not an exaggeration. That thought is based on an actual reality.

To think in that way may not necessarily be a fault. However, as I mentioned earlier, if someone were not to have a nose, even though you may notice it, in order not to hurt their feelings, it is better not to mention it. Even though it is a reality, they don't have a nose, there is no point going up to them and pointing it out to them because that might be taken as a criticism or as harmful speech. If someone doesn't have a nose, it is better for them not to look in the mirror because it will bring a shock! Apparently there is such an example used in the

teachings about someone who doesn't have a nose looking in the mirror and how it brings up an uncomfortable state of mind.

Question: I've been hoping for some good news and I've been told that it's not going to happen. How do I stop getting my hopes up and then being disappointed afterwards?

Answer: Actually the advice for that would be similar to the advice that I gave earlier on meditation – not to have too-high expectations. If you apply a lot of time and energy in meditating with a very high expectation, naturally because one is not used to meditation, after a while one can become disappointed. Similarly, with any situation in life, if we have too much expectation, it can definitely bring some disappointment later on.

So try to maintain a realistic view. Whatever hopes and wishes we may have, whether it's achieving something or acquiring something, one has to have a realistic approach. A realistic approach would be to investigate, look into the wishes or hopes that we hold. Can they be achieved or not? Is there a means to achieve it or not? Can I apply those means myself or not? We need to look into the general and personal aspects of how to approach that goal.

Otherwise, one will have high hopes and just leave it at that, and disappointment will definitely arise from that. Amongst the Tibetans we have a saying, "Many Tibetans are let down by their high hopes". Sometimes it is quite absurd how we approach our wishes: we have a high wish, but then we don't do anything about it, as though they will just fall into our laps and come about naturally. Of course, the reality is that nothing comes about naturally just like that, without any causes and effort.

So if we wish for happiness, we have to definitely create the causes to achieve happiness. Happiness is definitely achievable, and if our wish is to lessen our suffering, there are definitely ways and means to overcome suffering, but we have to apply the causes and conditions for that to come about. Unfortunately, just hoping that it will happen will not bring about results.

It's the same with relationships. Often people have high expectations, or a wish to find the perfect person. They think they will meet the perfect girl or the perfect man. With that kind of idea, they go searching, searching, but somehow they never seem to meet that perfect person they have in their mind. Even though the wish may be there, in reality, knowing whether it is achievable or not is something different.

Geshe-la says he often hears people saying: "I would like to marry and settle down but I haven't met the right person yet". When people approach him saying they haven't met the right person yet, Geshe-la says he often asks them, have you checked whether you are the right person?! (*laughter*)

Question: When a woman has a miscarriage and she goes to eight weeks – can Geshe-la give me some wisdom about what is the karma of the woman and also of her child which wasn't born but was alive for eight weeks?

Answer: It is must definitely be a combination of the

karma of the mother and child because both suffer. It's hard of course in a particular instance to identify what particular cause would have created it. That's why karma is said to be very subtle and profound. It's very difficult really for an individual to say.

There seem to be many conditions that have to come together for a birth to take place, and for a mother to be pregnant. There are many times when one of those conditions may not be intact. The parents themselves have to have the right karma to have the child, to be able to bear a child. Then the substances from the father and mother have to be intact. If the substances are damaged, that will affect the child's development, and if there are problems with the mother's womb and so forth, that also would become a condition to prevent its health, so there are many conditions which are required. The parents definitely also have to have created the karma to have children.

Question: I've read a Jataka tale about a teaching about when a bodhisattva was alive and there was a very angry man who wanted to hurt him and the bodhisattva ended up sitting there while this very angry man cut off his arms and ears and nose and did all these terrible things to him and the bodhisattva didn't do anything. And I was just wondering if it is better to allow people to create bad karma for themselves by insulting you and everything, or for their benefit to try to stop them so that they are not getting bad karma? Which is the better action from my side?

Answer: If one can find a solution where one can be free from harm as well as stopping the other from creating the negative karma, that of course is the best solution. Especially as Geshe-la related earlier in the case of a threat to one's life: if you can prevent your life being lost while also protecting the other's life and not harming the other, that would be the best solution.

I think if you can stop others' negative actions without getting angry yourself, that maybe would be the best solution. In some situations, there might be a cunning way for you to prevent the other's harmful action towards you by using tricks. But there may be times when it is necessary that you show a stern aspect – meaning that you do not get really angry or generate anger in yourself, but show an aspect of sternness, so that other will know that you are being serious and leave you alone.

When I was living in Varanasi, there was a young reincarnated lama, that I used to be fond of. We used to be friends. Once when we went together, an Indian started to tease him in a shop. The reincarnated lama got upset and actually hit him. With that, many Indians started to crowd around and really harass the young lama by taking off his watch and trying to rob him. In that sort of grave situation, with all the Indians coming together and possibly causing harm, I started to pretend that I had a knife in my pocket. I put my hand in my pocket and when the Indians saw that, they became afraid and left him alone and all ran away. There were about 20 people! (*laughter*)

We can actually use our intelligence in situations like

that. The intelligence we acquire during our learning and study can be used even in situations like that. If you pretend, if you know that it will scare the Indians away, why not do that action so that you will be left alone and not be harmed?

There is also the story about two people engaged in an argument who were about to fight. One of them had a sword and the other one didn't have a knife but in the heat of the moment took out a feather that he wetted! When he applied that wet feather to the neck, the other person immediately felt a cold sensation and thought that it must have been a knife and he immediately froze and was not able to attack back. So even a wet feather can be useful! *(laughter)*

Try to focus the mind again. This time we are focusing on the mantra to be recited.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed from tape by Lois Smith
Edit 1 by Mary-Lou Considine
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version
© Tara Institute*