
The Condensed Lam Rim

༄༅། །བྱུང་རྒྱུ་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བཞུགས་སོ། །

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

14 February 2007

As usual it would be good to do some meditation.

If I were to ask you, wouldn't it be good to do some meditation, naturally it would trigger the question, but why would it be good to do that? This is a question worth considering.

The answer is that if we wish to guard our mind from negativities and cultivate the good qualities in our mind, meditation is the best way to do that. Further, as a natural consequence of meditation, we find that on a physical level the body naturally relaxes as the mind begins to relax. This brings about a comfortable, subdued feeling within us. So for that purpose also, meditation is beneficial.

Now we will explain how to guard the mind from negativities, taking the example of the negative mental state of anger. When we experience anger, it is always in relation to an object. For as long as our mind focuses on the object of anger, it will be disturbed. So for the mind not to be influenced by anger, it is important to withdraw it from the object of anger. Withdrawing the mind from the object and keeping it focused inside is what we refer to as guarding the mind from negativities.

We are influenced by our mind and we follow its whims, but the mind itself is influenced by negative states, which we call delusions. And a consequence, we harm ourselves. This is how the negative mental state of anger completely overpowers us and disturbs our mind. However if we were to recognise what was happening when the mind was being influenced by the delusions, even though it may still be affected, we can make a difference. As soon as we notice the mind being influenced by the delusions, we can take control of it. We can prevent the mind from being completely overtaken by the negative state of anger.

So, if we are influenced by our mind and our mind is influenced by the delusions, there are two choices we face. On the one hand, we can allow the mind to be disturbed by a negative state, and on the other hand we can recognise that the mind is being influenced by a delusion and immediately try to counteract this through meditation, by guarding the mind.

If we had the choice, would we choose a mind influenced by the delusions, such as anger, which will make us feel disturbed and uncomfortable? Or would we choose a mind that is free from anger, or at least try to subdue the anger and not be affected by it, to the extent where the mind could remain peaceful? Facing these two choices, anyone in their right mind would naturally choose to be more peaceful and calm. It is important for us to look at the alternatives and see what we would naturally adopt. If we choose to adopt the positive state of mind – even though it is difficult – we can train ourselves to do that. This is where meditation, training the mind, comes in.

We have explained how our mind can be influenced either

negatively, or positively when we recognise that negative influence and try to overcome it. We can definitely judge from our own experience which option is more comfortable. Even with limited experience, we can see how, if the mind is disturbed and influenced by the delusions, it creates an uncomfortable feeling. For those of us who attempt to do some meditation, we will notice that as soon as the mind is withdrawn from the object of our delusion and is subdued, we will feel a certain amount of tranquillity and peace.

This experience itself should be a gauge for us to understand that it is possible to achieve that state of peace if we put an effort into it. When we notice the possibility of subduing the mind, of withdrawing it from the object of the delusions and bringing it into a relatively tranquil state, this experience can become a source of inspiration for us to continue meditating.

Even when the mind is in a negative state, we can use that opportunity as a reminder not to allow ourselves to be influenced by negativity, as it will feel uncomfortable and just lead to more mental disturbance and unease. If our mind is in a negative state and we use mindfulness to recall that if we were to allow ourselves to be influenced by that negative state of mind it would just become worse. This experience should also be an inspiration for us to overcome the negative state of mind. Using these two approaches, we can use our own experience to inspire ourselves.

The ability to use our own experience as a measure or gauge to decide what is beneficial and what is harmful is called discriminating awareness or wisdom. As we engage in the process of checking up for ourselves what is beneficial to us, what is harmful, what emotions contribute to our happiness, what emotions contribute to frustration or disturbance in the mind, we are increasing our discriminating wisdom, which is an important tool for our progress. As we cultivate and use this discriminating wisdom, it increases and becomes our main tool for discerning between positive and negative emotions, so that we can eliminate negative mind states and increase the positive ones.

In fact seeing what is going on in our mind during meditation can be quite amusing. At certain times when we check our mind, we will notice all sorts of things arising – things that seem quite silly and strange. When we begin to notice this, we can actually laugh at the silliness of our mind! But there are other times when we look into our mind and find that there is a certain potential we may have not realised before, and this becomes a real inspiration. We begin to feel we have this potential within us. So checking the mind can be both amusing as well as a means to find out more about oneself.

Having explained the importance of meditation, we will now engage in meditation. First, sit in a comfortable and relaxed physical posture. The actual meditation begins when, having chosen an object to focus on, we discipline our mind to focus on the object completely. When we engage in concentrated meditation, our goal is to focus on the chosen object, and maintain that focus single-pointedly, which means the mind is focused only on the object and not distracted by other things that may come up.

To be able to focus single-pointedly on the object, we must first recognise the main obstacle to concentrating single-pointedly – it is the distracted state of mind caused by conceptual thoughts. Even if the environment is conducive and quiet and there are no other disturbances around, it is the conceptual thoughts rising in the mind that keep distracting

us. Initially we must recognise that the main obstacle to concentrating single-pointedly in our meditation is the distracted mind. We can use awareness to overcome this: whenever we notice the mind being distracted, we can bring the focus back to the object.

We repeatedly bring the focus back on the object, which in this case is our own breath. As we notice the mind becoming distracted, we again gently bring it back to the object of our focus, the breath. Just by being aware of the mind and bringing it back onto the object, we will be able to eventually achieve single-pointed concentration. *(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

Continuing from last topic in the text that we have been studying, we have covered the explanation of non-virtuous actions and their opposite, the virtuous actions. We explained in detail the creation of negative karma, which is engaging in any of the ten non-virtues. Having explained in detail the cause and effects of negative karmas, the teaching went on to explain that even when we are able to recognise negative karmas, we may still find ourselves engaging in non-virtues. How can we purify the negative karmas we have created in the past and that we are creating now?

This is the point we are at in the teaching – the purification process. As we explained previously, negative karma has one good quality, which is that it can be purified – that is the only quality of negative karma. It is important point to reflect on this and not be too overwhelmed by the explanation of negative karma. We must remind ourselves that we can purify whatever negative karma we have created.

Having understood this; the next step is trying to engage in the purification practices. When we reflect on how we have created negative karmas, it is equally important to engage in the practices of purification. As explained previously, there are four main means in the process of purification, which are called the four opponent powers.

The first power is known as the power of regret, which we have covered previously. The power of regret means developing strong regret for the negative karma one has created. After recognising that we have engaged in negative deeds, we should recall that 'it was not proper for me to have engaged in negative actions, I really regret the negative karma that I have created'. For purification, we need to strongly develop this sense of regret in our mind.

We develop strong regret by reflecting on the effects of the negative karma we have created. The more we contemplate the negative consequences we will experience from the negative actions we have engaged in, the stronger the regret in our mind. To give an example, even in the mundane world, if someone were to engage in the offence of stealing, if that act of stealing was serious enough to be punishable by law, that person would be imprisoned. As soon as the

person who had engaged in the act of stealing was convicted, immediately when they realised the consequences would be to go to jail, they would naturally feel regret and think 'I wish I hadn't done the act that will now put me into jail'. So the thought of regretting the action and its consequences would come up in the mind.

Similarly, whatever negative karma we have engaged in, as the teaching explains, has consequences. If we do not experience the [karmic] consequences in this life, we will experience them in the future, in the form of ripening consequences, or consequences similar to the cause, or environmental consequences. The more we reflect on the particular consequences or effects of negative karma – in particular the ripening results, the results similar to the cause, and the environmental results – the more we will come to feel that we don't wish to experience these results.

As many of the [karmic] results [we have created the cause for] will ripen in the future, we must think about the points of the teachings over and over again so that they start to become a reality for us. We must think about the infallibility of cause and effect, which means that if there is a positive cause, naturally the effect will be positive; if there's a negative cause, naturally there will be a negative effect. That is what is called the infallibility of cause and effect.

For a positive cause, there is always going to be a positive result, if that positive cause has not been destroyed. If there are no hindrances in between, definitely a positive result will be experienced [in the future]. Likewise, when a negative karma has been created, if there is no purification practice [in between] to purify it, as a natural consequence, there'll definitely be a negative result experienced. This is infallible, this is the reality, the truth. We must think about the reality or truth of the situation of karma, which means the cause-and-effect sequence.

Of course, in the teachings, we talk about the two truths, ultimate truth and relative truth. Here, when we talk about the truth or infallibility of karma, it specifically means that when there is a positive cause, there is a positive result; when there is a negative cause, there is a negative result. This infallible or unchangeable reality is what is called the truth of karma. The more we reflect on the truth or infallibility of karma, the stronger will be our regret. This is therefore very important to consider.

Because developing an understanding of the infallibility of karma is crucial for us to develop strong regret and thus engage in purification practice, the teachings encourage us to develop strong faith in the infallibility of karma. The teachings emphasize developing faith first and ultimately conviction: this is because initially it is hard for us to see the infallibility of karma when the consequences or effects go beyond this life and will be experienced in future lives. It is a bit difficult for us to accept this at face value, because we don't have an immediate experience of this, and we cannot see the results. It is hard enough for us to find a pattern to [the consequences of our actions in] this life, let alone trying to think about the consequences we will experience in a future life. Therefore the teachings encourage us to develop faith.

There is a procedure for developing faith in the infallibility of karma that goes beyond this life: this is done by reflecting on the infallibility of cause and effect in this life, from our own immediate experience. If we can relate it to our own immediate experience, it makes more sense to us.

For example, it is our experience that if we act in a negative, obnoxious way and we are cruel to others, eventually or even immediately, we would feel some negative response from others. They would not trust us, would not like us, would criticise us and so forth and that would make us feel uncomfortable. So if we exhibit anger in an extreme way now, we will feel the immediate experience or result right away.

On the other hand, if we exhibit love and compassion, are nice to others and show good behaviour, then as a natural consequence we will be liked by others, we will be considered their friends and so forth. We will immediately experience a sense of well-being from our attitude and behaviour. So we don't have to look at our future or past lives, but we can see right now, from our immediate experience, that when we have good behaviour or a good attitude, as a natural consequence we will have some good feeling, good result for ourselves and vice versa.

Using our immediate experience, we can relate that to the infallibility of karma – how when we do good, the natural consequences or results will be good and positive; but if we engage in negative thoughts and actions, the consequences for us will be negative. If you can reflect on the infallibility of karma through relating to your own experience now, slowly you will begin to grasp the possibility of there being a future life; then, if there is a future life, how certain effects, certain negative karmas that we create now could be experienced in the future.

The main point made when karma is explained is that the Buddha says if you generate a positive attitude and engage in good behaviour, as a result you will experience a sense of well-being, a positive result. But if you were to adopt a negative attitude or negative behaviour, as a consequence or natural result you will have unpleasant feelings and experiences. This is the main advice given by the Buddha. This advice is really useful for us. It is not something that we are naturally aware of, so to receive the advice and to be able to put it into practice is something that will be beneficial for us.

In order to engage in the second opponent power, which is called the power of the opponent force, there are particular practices one can do. The teachings describe engaging in the practice of the recitation of the Thirty-Five Buddhas as a purification practice, or reciting the Golden Light Sutra. The power of the opponent force is to be understood as a mental power – because we create karma on a mental level, we need to use a mental power to overcome it. The power of opponent force is a mental activity that we practise as a means to overcome another mental activity that we have engaged in previously, which is the negative karma.

There are six specific practices in relation to the opponent force: reading profound sutras; meditating on emptiness; reciting the mantras of the buddhas; making statues and images of the buddhas; making offerings; and repeating the names of the buddhas.

Reading the profound sutras is also [referred to in this specific translation] as relying on the profound sutras. Relying on the profound sutras includes reading the sutras, memorising the profound sutras and thinking about their meaning. Profound sutras would be, for example, sutras of the Buddha that explain emptiness, such as the Heart Sutra, which we recited today. I think we have covered this before, but we will just go over the main point briefly. Meditating

on emptiness would mean meditating on the ultimate nature of all existence; when we reflect on any particular object, we would meditate on the non-inherent existence of that object.

Reciting mantras is apparently where we left off in the last session, so we can continue from that in the next session. Any questions before we end this session? It would be nice to have a good profound question. It's quite hot so we don't want to keep you too long. When the weather is quite hot, it can also affect the thinking process.

This is a question which I have been wanting to ask: if emptiness is form and form is emptiness, then what is formlessness?

First of all, the understanding that form is emptiness should be basically understood as I have explained before. In the Heart Sutra, the question asked by Shariputra of Avalokiteshvara or Chenrezig was how should one consider the five aggregates? If one were to look into the emptiness of the five aggregates, how should one look into the emptiness of the five aggregates? As an answer, Avalokiteshvara said one must look into the non-inherent existence of the five aggregates. That is how one should reflect on the emptiness of the five aggregates by seeing the non-inherent existence.

Reflecting on the first aggregate, which is the form aggregate, the form aggregate does exist, but it does not exist inherently or by its own characteristics. The opposite of this is that if form were to exist inherently, how would it exist? It would exist independently, without having to rely on anything else. It would have to exist in and of itself - independently, and that is negated – form cannot exist in and of itself without relying on anything else. That explains the emptiness of form. Is that understood? So when the phrase 'emptiness is form' is explained that means form is not completely non-existent. If it were non-existent, that would be extreme. 'Emptiness is form' is indicating that although form does not exist inherently, it does not mean it does not exist entirely, so how does it exist? The way it exists is that it exists relatively or conventionally.

Geshe-la, if karma is infallible, how does one account for untimely death?

First of all, untimely death must be understood in its context. This is I think a question that has been raised before. Basically the term itself seems to suggest that it is untimely and that context itself should be understood when we look at what it means. I don't know what your understanding of untimely means, but definitely it doesn't mean that there is a specific time for some person's death, while another who does not have any given time for their death does not have to die. That is not, of course, what it means. The difference between timely death and untimely death does not mean that there are specific times where some people will certainly die while others don't have a specific time. It doesn't mean that.

The teachings explain untimely death in this way: say someone were to have the karma from a previous life to live to a certain age, say 60, but then they reached 40 or 45 and, due to some condition or unfavourable circumstances such as an accident, they died earlier, even when they had the initial karma to live to 60. In relation to the question of the infallibility of karma, we must therefore conclude that because a person dies at 45 or 40 or 30 due to unfavourable circumstances, even though they were born with the karma to live to 60, the positive karma that they have created from the past for the remaining 30 years of their lifespan will still go on with them to be used in another life. They have lived

up to a certain age, but due to unfavourable circumstances, they were not able to live up to the karma that initially propelled them towards this life. But the remaining karma or potential is still within their mind and that can be used in the future. That's how it should be understood.

To give an example, if someone were to have a karma to live to only 40 and they somehow discovered that they had only that long to live, if they engaged in practices such as doing retreats and receiving long-life initiations, it is said that their life can be prolonged. The karma for lifespan will be karma one has created in the past and which has not been used up in the past. It can be brought forth now, due to doing long-life initiations and retreats, which activate that positive karma from the past; one can then prolong one's present life to live further. So this unused lifespan karma from the past is being used to extend one's life now: unripened lifespan karma from the past, which has not been used, can be brought forward now and be utilised to live a longer life now.

What I had in mind is the Buddha's cousin, Devadatta, who made four attempts on the Buddha's life. Why wouldn't he have realised the [karmic consequences] and stopped after the first attempt?

It is really hard to discern exactly what is the karma in that situation, but as you said Devadatta made attempts on the Buddha's life, such as digging a pit and filling it with charcoal and so forth. In the case where he dug a pit and filled it with charcoal, when the Buddha walked over it, Devadatta's plan was for Buddha to fall in and die, but the charcoals all turned into flowers. Basically that goes to show the negative, competitive state of mind that Devadatta always had, being jealous of the Buddha's qualities. It is a way of showing how, even with an evil mind of jealousy and wanting to compete with the Buddha, the Buddha being a realised being is not affected. That's how it's explained in the teachings but it is hard to know exactly what the situation was.

What did Buddha mean when he found the Middle Path or Middle Way?

The interpretation of what the Middle Way is, according to Buddha's teachings and what the Buddha said, is that he found or established a path that is free from extremes in terms of the view. The path that is free of the extremes of eternalism or nihilism is the Middle Way path. Of course, each religion may consider its own path as a Middle Way. The very connotation of 'middle way' – being in middle – suggests that you are not on either side. When you talk of a person being in the middle, you are referring to a person not taking sides. When you talk about a person being in the middle of an argument, being in the middle means they are not taking the side of either opponents. Likewise here when we talk about the path of the Middle way, we are referring particularly to being free of the views of either eternalism or nihilism.

Geshe-la, if science discovers that reincarnation doesn't exist, then Buddhism's view of life and death differs from the scientific view of life and death. How does Buddhism reconcile this view?

As most people these days rely on scientific views, if science can actually prove that [reincarnation doesn't exist], then I would say that maybe the Buddhist view may have to be left behind, people would not see that as the truth.

The Buddha's teaching also refers to what you can see and experience with your visual perception as being direct perception, which cannot be contradicted. So if this were to

be proven with direct perception, it would have to be accepted. In Buddhism it explains that one establishes something as existing or not, as or true or not, by valid perception.

There is different levels of valid perception. Something that can be seen or perceived directly is proven by a direct valid perception. For example, the colour white is an object that can be seen with a direct valid perception. Therefore it is a visual object; its existence is established by a direct valid perception that perceives white. Now if someone were to come and insist that this is not white but red, persistently this cannot be proven to be red. Why? Because it goes against the valid perception of seeing it as being white. Anyone who has a valid perception when they look at white will see it as white, they will not see it as red. If they see it as red or any other colour, it means it is not a valid perception: there is a faulty, wrong perception. Their perception has a defect which is hindering them from seeing the colour white.

Following this logic, it is said that if future life can be disproved through valid perception of seeing that there is no future life, it would have to be accepted that there's no future life – if it can be proven. So while Buddhism states that there is a future life, if it can be proven through direct valid perception that there is no future life, that would have to be accepted because it would be going against the valid perception.

You talk about regret. How do you feel regret without feeling guilty, the negative thoughts that go with it?

Translator: This is a difficult question for me to translate because there is no word for guilt in Tibetan. I'll try to explain the feeling which comes with guilt.

Answer: Regret in its true sense as explained in the teachings would definitely differ to what we would consider to be guilt. The feeling of regret is developed according to the explanations in the teachings: it is developed with the sense of knowing that you can do something about it. It is not the end of the world, so to speak.

First of all, [regret] means you have recognised what you have done in the past as unwise, but that you can remedy, or overcome it. As the teachings explain, the moment one develops regret for any negative action one has done, a feeling that the action was unwise and incorrect, that feeling in itself is regret and it purifies half the negative action one has done. That should encourage us strongly – just by recognising and accepting that the deed we have done was improper or incorrect, that feeling purifies half the negative karma. That should encourage us to think about the consequences of karma, when we understand that if karma is purified, we will not experience the negative consequences. Developing regret is a part of the means to purify it.

Therefore, when regret is developed in its true sense, it should encourage us and we should feel more inspiration, rather than feeling depressed and unhappy. It gives a sense of wanting to do something about it.

Now before ending the session, we will take a few moments to do some meditation. This time, as we focus inward and distance our mind from the distractions, we can bring our focus upon the sound of the mantra to be recited.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

© Tara Institute