
The Condensed Lam Rim

༄༅། །བྱང་ལྷན་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བརྒྱུག་པ་སོ། །

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

9 May 2007

It will be good to spend sometime in meditation as usual. For that purpose we find a comfortable, upright and relaxed posture. The purpose of meditation can be summarised into two main purposes. Firstly, for those who have a disturbed, agitated state of mind that lacks peace, meditation serves initially to obtain a relative calmness and peace of mind. Secondly, for those who have engaged in the practise of meditation and have obtained a certain level of tranquillity and peace of mind, meditation serves to maintain whatever tranquillity and peace one has. It requires constant nurturing and strengthening to be able to maintain peace.

Meditation is a means to obtain qualities that one has not previously obtained. Meditation can also serve as a purpose to maintain, strengthen and increase those qualities one has already obtained. The process of obtaining positive qualities in our mind is a process of eliminating the negativities in the mind. If we experience a lack of peace and a disturbed mind that is because we have negativities in the mind. Until and unless the negativities are removed from the mind one does not achieve the qualities of tranquillity and peace of mind. There are many other positive qualities that can be obtained. Meditation serves as a purpose to obtain numerous qualities of the mind and in that same process to eliminate negativities.

You should consider the reasons for the lack of tranquillity and peace in your mind right now. The teachings explain that the actual nature of the mind is to be clear and pure. The very fundamental nature of the mind is unstained and pure. What has happened is that many other negative mental states obscure that purity of the mind and serve as distractions. Different negative states arise in the mind as distractions and what are called superstitious conceptual thoughts. The more distractions, superstitious conceptual thoughts, we have in our mind the more the mind becomes disturbed and obscures the pure and the clear nature of our mind.

The distractions in the mind serve as a means to disturb the mind and thus the mind lacks tranquillity or peace. The process for obtaining tranquillity and peace of mind is by slowly eliminating, or initially distancing ourselves, from distractions. This is done by choosing a neutral or positive object as the single object of focus and then trying to maintain focus on that chosen object. As we familiarize our mind with focusing single-pointedly on a chosen object the mind will naturally go into a tranquil, peaceful state as a result of clearing away the obscurations or distractions in the mind. That process of distancing oneself from the distractions and getting in tune with the actual nature of the mind becomes the means for obtaining a tranquil, peaceful state of the mind. This is because the nature of the mind is unstained by the distractions and negativities.

This is actually a very crucial point in Buddhism that one must always adhere to, understand and remember. The very nature of the mind is pure and clear, and the clarity of the

mind is always there as a fundamental nature. Our mind becomes disturbed or agitated when distractions or negativities obscure that nature. The teachings explain that the negativities, no matter how powerful and influential they seem, do not permeate the actual mind. The obscurations or negativities do not permeate the mind and are not one with the mind itself.

If the negativities were inseparable from the nature of the mind there would not be much we could do. There would not be much hope. It would be pointless to strive to achieve peace because that would not be possible. The reason why obtaining a peaceful state of mind is possible and the mind can be freed from all negativities is because the negativities are not inseparable from the mind. They can be separated. They are not in the same nature of the mind itself and thus they can be separated. Thus we can remove the negativities in the process of meditation.

To illustrate this point we can use the particular example of one of the negativities; anger. We all notice that they are times when we may become very angry. There are people we know who are very easily irritated. However, no matter how angry someone becomes, that intensity their anger only remains in their mind for a period of time. After a certain period of time their anger slowly goes away and they become relatively calmer. If we spend the whole day today getting very angry the next day will be different. That shows that anger is not in nature of the mind. If anger were in nature of the mind and inseparable from the mind, then if someone gets angry at a certain time that anger would have to remain at that intensity. The continuity of the intensity of anger would always have to be present but that is not so.

We can give another analogy of how the delusions are not in the nature of the mind. If it were to be one in nature with the mind then it could not be separated from the mind, just like fire and the heat of fire. The heat of fire is not separable from that fire, because the heat of fire is said to be in the very nature of fire. Thus, wherever there is fire there is heat, they are inseparable. If a negativity of the mind such as anger were inseparable it would have to be like heat and fire.

What is being clarified by Geshe-la does not apply the other way round because there can be heat but there doesn't have to be an actual fire. But wherever there is fire, there is heat. That means that fire itself is in the nature of having heat and inseparable from it. To again clarify this point, there can be heat without fire. When there is very hot weather we can feel very hot. There is heat but, of course, fire is not present.

As mentioned previously, as long as the negativity such as the distractions are present in the mind and we allow our mind to be influenced by those distractions to that extent the mind becomes disturbed. There is turbulence in the mind, agitation and so forth. Therefore in classes of meditation the technique is to distance our mind from the distractions for the time that we allocate ourselves for doing meditation. We develop a very strong determination that for the time being one will not allow one's mind to be influenced by distractions and one will take control of one's mind to focus on the chosen object which, in this case, is the breath. So in the few minutes of meditation that we do we bring our full attention and focus upon the breath and as we observe the natural rhythm of the breath, the inflow and outflow of our breathing. We maintain our focus entirely upon that and distance our mind from the distractions. So, for a few minutes, we will focus on our breath in this way. (*Pause for meditation.*)

4.2.2.1.2. The actual way to take the essence

4.2.2.1.2.2. Training the mind in the stages of the path held in common with beings of the medium scope

4.2.2.1.2.2.1. The link

We have now covered the part that explains the practices that are shared or common with the small scope. We now come to the second part of the text that explains the practices that are common to the medium scope.. There are two main outlines in the beginning. These are the link and the actual explanation. The link here is a link or connection with the previous section. The previous practices were those that are shared with the being of small scope. The link explains how those are related to the practice of the medium scope and then how the medium scope is related to the further practices of the great scope. It shows how they are all linked together.

The text explains that what has been explained so far in the practices of the small scope were the awareness of impending death and that at death one would not cease to exist but instead go on to a future rebirth. Having contemplated how the future rebirth could be undesirable or unfortunate one generates a strong determination to avoid unfortunate rebirths in a future lifetime and focuses on practises to obtain a fortunate rebirth in the next lifetime.

The text further explains that having developed a strong determination to obtain a good rebirth in the next lifetime one engages in the practices of generating the thought of refuge, taking refuge and then observing the cause and effect we call karma. From understanding karma one then absorbs karma by avoiding engaging in negative karmas and adopting virtuous karmas.

We can explain this process in a more systematic way by relating it to the Four Noble Truths. This process can be related to the suffering to be understood, specifically in the practices that are common in the small scope. The sufferings here would relate to the sufferings of the unfortunate or lower rebirths. Then, having understood the intensity of suffering in the lower rebirths one comes to understand the causes or origination of that suffering, which are delusions and karma. One understands that by engaging in the ten unvirtuous deeds or karmas one will create the causes to be reborn in unfortunate births. From understanding that process one generates a strong wish to be free from negative karma and one then aspires to obtain the cessation of being reborn in the lower rebirth. That can be related to the cessation in the Four Noble Truths. The path that leads to the cessation would be adopting the ten virtuous deeds, the ten virtuous karmas. Engaging in the ten virtuous karmas means specifically and intentionally avoiding the ten unvirtuous deeds. That then becomes the path that leads to the cessation of experiencing the suffering of being reborn in the lower realms. This process then leads on further to the higher states that one wishes to obtain. In this way we can understand it in a more structured way.

This process of explaining it within the structure of the Four Noble Truths is in line with what the Buddha has said about the Four Noble Truths. He said that the sufferings are to be understood, the origination of sufferings is to be abandoned, the cessation is to be obtained and the path is to be practised and actualised.

The text further explains the process of actualisation of the practises that are shared in the small scope. Having engaged in the practices such as taking refuge and abiding by the law of karma, which is to avoid the negative karmas and

adopt the virtuous karmas, there is no doubt or question that one would obtain the positive result of being reborn in a fortunate life.

One should not, however, feel content with just obtaining a good rebirth in the next life. After one has developed the intention of the practices that are in common with the small scope one uses that as the basis to develop the intention of being of a middle scope which is to regard the entire cycle existence as an unpleasurable state. One develops disgust in the whole of cyclic existence by understanding the suffering of the whole of cyclic existence. One develops disgust for the whole of cyclic existence and thus aspires to achieve a state completely free from cyclic existence. This is developed by understanding that even when one has obtained a rebirth in the higher state, such as a human or divine god, that rebirth is still in the nature of suffering. Using that as a basis one further develops oneself in line with the intention of the great scope that is inspired by love and compassion. One develops the altruistic wish to benefit all and thus develops the intention of the great scope.

To clarify the process in more detail; once one has developed a fear of lower rebirths and the wish to be reborn in the higher rebirths then, based on that, one furthers one understanding by contemplating how the entire cyclic existence, whether it is a lower rebirth or a higher rebirth, is still in the nature of suffering. By gaining a sound understanding of that one then develops a strong determination to be entirely free from cycle existence so that one can be entirely free from suffering. Then one develops a very strong determination to be entirely free from cyclic existence and longs to achieve liberation. That state of mind is called renunciation, a spontaneously renounced state of mind. The renunciation that one develops in relation to oneself becomes the basis for developing the altruistic wish to benefit other beings. This is developed on the basis of love and compassion and later develops into bodhicitta, the altruistic wish to free all beings from all sufferings. The wish to achieve enlightenment for that sake is the altruistic wish intention.

In order to develop the altruistic intention to free all sentient beings one must first develop renunciation, which means the intention to free oneself from all the sufferings of cyclic existence. The main point that is being made here is that without that basis one cannot develop the altruistic wish to benefit all other beings. The main intention of the teaching of the entire path to enlightenment, the Lam Rim or the graduated path to enlightenment can be said to be the bodhicitta attitude, the altruistic wish to achieve enlightenment.

The practice of the small scope and the medium scope are explained as a basis to develop renunciation. Without developing renunciation there is no means to develop bodhicitta. The explanation of the small and medium scopes becomes a gradual process of developing bodhicitta..

As a great master has mentioned, without developing even a fraction of renunciation for oneself how could one ever develop the intention to free other beings from suffering. That is very true and is explained by the teachings. If one does not see the faults of cyclic existence one does not develop a wish to be free oneself. Since there is no intention, nor understanding, of the need to be free oneself there can't be the intention to free others. Thus the process is that one first develops a very strong, sound understanding of the disadvantages and pitfalls of cyclic existence and that cyclic existence basically comes down to the contaminated

aggregates. The causes for developing the contaminated aggregates are the delusions and karma within oneself and that is what is cyclic existence really is. The disadvantages of cyclic existence means the disadvantages of one's own contaminated aggregates. One sees that the contaminated aggregates, such as the contaminated physical body and the contaminated mental aggregates are the basis for us to continuously experience many different types of suffering.

There is never a time where things are completely all right and everything is perfect. As long as we have this physical body, which is a contaminated aggregate, nothing we do seems to bring a real, lasting satisfaction and contentment. When contemplating this reality one sees that as long as we have the causes for the contaminated aggregates we possess, which are the delusions and the karma that we created through the influence of the delusions within oneself, one will always have to experience the disadvantages arising from the contaminated aggregates which are the various types of sufferings.

If one tries to focus outwards one might lose this point. It is much more practical to focus on one's own shortcomings and the disadvantages within one's own cyclic existence. One develops a very strong, sound understanding of the disadvantages of one's own contaminated aggregates and one understands the causes of that which are the delusions and karma within oneself. That is followed by a strong determination to cease the causes of experiencing all the shortcomings of oneself. When that is developed very strongly within oneself one then uses the same understanding one gained in relation to oneself to focus on others. When one sees how others are also experiencing the shortcomings of the contaminated aggregates one can develop the wish to free other beings from samsara as well.

The text then explains that even if one were to obtain the results of the practices which are explained for the beings of small scope, which is to obtain rebirth as a human being or in a divine state as in the god realms, that this is still in the nature of suffering and that one doesn't escape from being reborn in the nature of suffering and so there is no real pleasure, no real happiness, to be experienced.

Then, having exhausted one's karma to be reborn in those higher states one will again have to fall down to being reborn in a lower rebirth. To be reborn in a higher rebirth is as if one is coming to the edge of a cliff or a precipice. As soon as you walk further you will fall down. Being reborn in the state of a human or the divine god realms is similar. One is reborn in that state temporarily to enjoy some sort of temporary pleasures but which is not real happiness in its nature but is actually suffering in its nature. When the karma to be reborn in that state is exhausted, one has to fall down again to a lower rebirth. Thinking in these terms there is nothing attractive about being reborn in a higher rebirth when it is only a foothold before one falls down again.

The shortcomings and sufferings of a human being are something we can definitely relate to what we experience with our contaminated body. The suffering that we have in relation to our contaminated body seems to be very much actually in its own nature. The very fact of having this body means that we will have to experience the suffering of hunger, the suffering of thirst, the sufferings of becoming sick and feeling cold or too hot. All of these unpleasant experiences come about in relation to the body. From the very moment we were born with this body it is as though those sufferings come as a package with the body.

Happiness is something we have to pursue in relation to our contaminated body. We need to work so hard to get some pleasure and happiness whereas the sufferings that we experience come along with the body. In that way we can definitely see that being reborn with a contaminated body is in the very nature of suffering and that there's no real pleasure and happiness that comes with the contaminated body. By realising that one can come to understand that whilst it is true that being reborn as a human is a relatively fortunate rebirth in comparison to lower rebirth it is still very much in the nature of suffering.

However, having a fortunate rebirth means we have the potential to utilise the understanding that we gain from the teachings as a tool to progress to a better state. The main advice that we should derive from the teaching is that being reborn in a higher rebirth is similar to being on the edge of the cliff ready to fall down. What we must understand is that we must avoid falling down to an unfortunate rebirth again. Falling down to a negative state is something that we should avoid and which can be avoided. The reason we can avoid that is because of the perfect conditions we have right now. We are able to utilise our human rebirth, what we call our intelligence, access to the spiritual path, the teachings we have and so forth. All this becomes the perfect conditions to create the causes to obtain happiness not only in this life, but for future rebirths as well as the ultimate happiness of liberation and enlightenment. We can all obtain and plant the seeds to develop the causes with this very rebirth that we have now.

The main advice is to use this rebirth and not to fall down, not to go over the precipice but to go to better, higher states rather than fall down. That is the main advice we should derive from here. The explanations of how one should avoid such rebirth, sufferings and so forth are explained further in the teachings and we will cover these in the next sessions.

Before we conclude for the evening, let us again take a few minutes to engage in some meditation. This time as we bring our mind inwards and distance ourselves from the distractions we focus on the mantra of Buddha Shakyamuni. As the mantra is recited we just focus on that and keep our mind focused.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

Transcribed from tape by Kim Yoke Looi

Edit 1 by John Burch

Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

Edited Version

© Tara Institute