
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

27 June 2007

As usual it would be good to first spend some time doing meditation. For that purpose, we sit in a comfortable and upright position.

Why do we need to meditate? In answering this question, we could also ask ourselves, do we wish for happiness or not, and do we wish to have a kind mind?

For everyone, the answer would be that everyone wishes for a happy and gentle mind; everyone would definitely wish for that. If we had a kind and gentle mind, naturally whatever we did, any activity we engaged in, would have good consequences, good results.

When we engage in an activity such as work and get good results, it brings about joy in our mind. We can rejoice and feel happy; it is something positive that we can feel happy about.

With a kind attitude, whatever activity we engage in will benefit ourselves and others. With a kind and gentle mind, we could never engage in an activity that harmed others. Activities that benefit oneself and others bring about a joyful and happy mind both for oneself and others.

This is what we call the practice of Dharma or the spiritual path. This is really how we should look upon the practice of the Dharma. When we engage in an action that benefits others, this naturally prevents us from harming them, so that act of not harming others, non-violence, is definitely a virtue. Non-virtue or negative karma is the act of harming others, so when we refrain from this, we stop the non-virtue.

When we cultivate a kind and gentle attitude in our mind, as mentioned earlier, this naturally brings about good consequences for oneself and others. However, even when we see the obvious benefits of cultivating a kind and gentle attitude, the reality is that it is difficult to cultivate such a kind mind. It is not an easy task.

This is because of opposing factors that obstruct the mind from being in a gentle and kind state. We call these factors the disturbing thoughts or emotions, which arise from within us. As we know, our mind is constantly busy with disturbing thoughts and emotions that can arise at any given time.

To subdue these disturbing and distracting thoughts, we practise the technique of meditation, of focusing on our breath. This will help the mind to settle down. As we bring our mind inward and focus on an inner object, this will naturally subdue the disturbing and distracting thoughts.

As we train our mind to settle down by focusing on an internal object, we will notice that the more we become

familiar with focusing on the internal object, the more stable and firm our mind will be. If we regularly practise this meditation technique, we can train our mind to remain in that stable and focused state for longer and longer durations. Once we achieve that natural focused state of mind, whatever activity we engage in will become meaningful because of the lack of disturbing emotions in the mind.

If we train in focusing the mind through regular practice using the two main tools of mindfulness and introspection, we will gain a certain kind of wisdom that can then be used in our everyday life. When we are not engaged in formal sitting practice and are pursuing worldly activities, there will be situations that would normally trigger strong emotions in our mind. In such situations we will be able to quickly apply the wisdom we have gained through our regular practice, and prevent our mind from being influenced by negative states. Thus we can guard our mind and prevent it from becoming totally immersed in frustration, suffering and so forth. This is how meditation can be beneficial.

So we will spend a few minutes in the practice of focusing our mind. The breath is the internal object that we use for this meditation. For the next few minutes we will try to bring our attention completely to the breath, distancing our mind from its normal external and internal distractions.

Distancing our mind in this sense means withdrawing our mind from its usual busyness and not allowing it to be influenced by thoughts, but rather keeping it completely, one-hundred-per-cent focused on the breath. We initially make the strong determination that for the next few minutes we will focus only on the breath, and keep our attention completely focused the breath. Then, during the meditation, we guard our mind so that it does not become distracted and try to maintain this for as long as we comfortably can.

When we engage in meditation practice, it is important to understand that we need to focus on an internal object such as the breath. This is because the very nature of the mind is to cognise or to know something, so just keeping the mind blank would not be a suitable technique for training the mind. Rather, we focus it on a chosen object then try to maintain our focus on that one particular object.

As the definition of mind suggests, the mind is a cognising factor, an entity that cognises, which knows. So in one way or another, the mind is always focused on a given object. Here, however, we are choosing a particular object – the breath – and maintaining our focus on that particular object. As we focus on the breath, it is important that we keep a normal rhythm in our breathing, and not labour over the breath by breathing in deeply and breathing out shallowly or vice versa. Rather, we keep breathing with our normal, regular rhythm: the air naturally flows in as we breathe in, then we breathe out naturally, maintaining our focus on the breath itself as it comes in and goes out. (*Pause for meditation*)

That should be sufficient for now. Just as we have engaged in meditation practice here, it would be good to adopt a regular practice in meditation at home, as that is

the primary means to protect and guard our mind. As we all know, we spend much time and energy accumulating the means to protect and guard our physical health and wealth, so it would be appropriate – even if we were not able to spend the same amount of time – to at least invest some time in guarding and protecting our mind.

Through this combination of protecting our body and putting some effort into guarding our mind, we can definitely gain some lasting happiness, because we will achieve wellbeing of both our physical body and our mind. Therefore it is good to pay attention to both levels of our being, if we wish to have some real genuine wellbeing.

If we do not pay attention to protecting or guarding our mind, it will bring about a sense of emptiness within us. There are times when everything appears to be going well for us physically – we may have sound health, sufficient material needs, wealth and so forth. However, the mind may still feel discontent, unhappy, unsettled and restless. This combines with a feeling of being empty, of something missing. This is because we have not paid much attention to how to maintain a healthy state of mind and, because of this negligence, we will experience unhappiness from time to time.

But if we pay attention to guarding our mind, using our mind in a constructive way, this will bring about a clear mental state where we are focused on what we are doing. As a result, we will have a much more settled, contented mind. We can definitely gauge this from our own experience and thus see the importance of developing a clear mind.

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 actual training in the reflections: the way to develop the mind that strives for liberation

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.1. Reflection on the truth of suffering - the faults of cyclic existence

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.1.2. The actual meditation on suffering

So referring to the text that we are covering, using it as the material for our teaching, we have come to the second heading under this outline – ‘the actual meditation of suffering’. This is section divided into two:

- reflecting on the general sufferings of cyclic existence, and
- reflecting on the particular sufferings of cyclic existence.

The first section is further subdivided into two:

- reflecting on the eight types of suffering, and
- reflecting on the six sufferings.

We may wonder why the sufferings of cyclic existence are explained so extensively, in terms of the eight types of suffering and the six sufferings. These are all included to kindle in us a profound understanding of the disadvantages of cyclic existence so that we will develop distaste for the pleasures of cyclic existence. When we develop disgust towards cyclic existence, the wish to be free from cyclic existence can be developed. So the sequence of the practice is that one first recognises the

suffering of cyclic existence; this causes us develop a sense of disgust and distaste for cyclic existence, so that we feel detachment from it; this, in turn, produces a sound determination to be free from cyclic existence and the wish to achieve liberation.

We should understand that generating distaste for the pleasures of cyclic existence doesn't necessarily mean that we must reduce those objects in our life. Rather, we train our mind to develop detachment so that, in relation to material things, we could still possess them but without having strong attachment towards them. Thus possessing material objects itself is not the fault but attachment to the material possessions is where the fault lies.

It is important to understand the context of detachment to material possessions, wealth and so forth when it is explained in the teachings. Not being attached to worldly possessions does not necessarily mean to get rid of all worldly possessions. Rather it means reducing one's desire towards material possessions, which can also result in one being less miserly.

If we take the example of money, some people may regard money as being dirty. However money is just a neutral thing. Money itself is not an evil object – it is the attachment to money that harms us. Having money itself would not be a problem if we know how to wisely use it and if we do not have strong attachment towards it.

For example, people who are miserly with their money and wealth are not only unable to share it with others, they are unable to even use it for themselves. We find situations where people reach a certain age and have a significant amount of money in their account, yet are unable to use it properly to sustain themselves comfortably because they are afraid that if they use it, they will have nothing left. So they hang on to that money; psychologically, they feel the security of having the money, but because they live in a poor situation, their health deteriorates, their situation is uncomfortable and, as a result, even those around them are uncomfortable because they know that the person has the means to live comfortably.

When someone lives like this out of miserliness, it brings distress for everyone. We can see that this is definitely the result of miserliness.

The teaching is explaining that we need to try to overcome strong attachment and miserliness in relation to wealth and possessions. Otherwise we may misinterpret the Buddha's teachings to mean that as a Buddhist you have to live poorly, that you should not own anything and live in a poor state and not own anything. That is not what the teachings are saying.

Having said that, it seems that miserliness also serves as a tool to save money. If one did not have any miserliness, one might not be able to save much money. I usually use Damien as an example of someone who extends their miserliness to saving money. He doesn't spend it all and has a good saving in his account! While the idea of miserliness may seem useful for saving money, particularly in the case of someone making a lot of money, say over \$84,000 a year, miserliness goes much deeper than just being able to save money.

There is much more to it than that. It seems a little bit absurd sometimes when people don't have money, they appear to be more generous. However, once they start getting money, they become more miserly. There are those who claim, "I don't have really much money, but if I had a large sum of money, I would really help others". What I tell such people is that while you may think like this now, if you really did get a large sum of money, once you actually had that money in your hands, you would think of how to invest that money so you could make more! This really often seems to be the case.

This category, the eight types of suffering, is subdivided into five. The first of the five subdivisions is the way to meditate on the sense faculties. This means that as one engages in the meditation practices described here, there are different stages that one meditates on in relation to one's abilities or sense faculties.

When one meditates on the teachings shared with persons of medium capacity, one must also take up the shared teachings of the person of small capacity. In other words, the practices that were explained in the small scope must be also adopted when one is meditating on the practices of the medium scope. As the teaching continues to explain, as for the teachings not shared with the persons of small capacity, if the mind is strong, one can sustain them in meditation exactly the way that has been described here. If it is weak, then leave out the scriptural citations and only meditate on the meaning of the points outlined. This is the way the text describes how to engage in the practice.

The second subdivision is the way in which one needs to be free of laxity and excitement when one engages in the practice of meditation. In this section, the teaching advises that, though these are analytical meditations, you should nonetheless arrest excitement in regard to the mental object, not taking up any object – virtuous, non-virtuous or ethically neutral – other than that upon which you are meditating. So without letting your mind fall under the influence of sleep, lethargy or laxity, meditate continually in a state of consciousness that is very clear and pure.

For those who are not familiar with it, there are two types of meditation – contemplative meditation and analytical meditation. Contemplative meditation is where one tries to develop single-pointed concentration on a chosen object, such as the meditation to develop calm abiding. Here, one develops a state of calm abiding, which is the perfected state of concentration where the mind is able to focus on a chosen object for as long as one wishes. So developing contemplative meditation is basically developing concentration: keeping one's mind focused on a chosen object and not letting it wander from that chosen object until one develops calm abiding. If the meditation is done to achieve calm abiding, then to keep focusing on that chosen object is what is called contemplative meditation.

With analytical meditation, one may choose different objects on which to focus. Nevertheless when analysing each particular object during analytical meditation, the mind should be focused on it and be free from laxity and excitement during that entire time. The difference

between contemplative meditation and analytical meditation is that, in the first case, one chooses one object and focuses one's attention on that chosen object; whereas with analytical meditation, one would focus on different objects at different times and analyse them, but still be completely focused during that time.

The point being made here is that during this meditation, you do not to let your mind fall under the influence of sleep, lethargy or laxity, but meditate continually in a state of consciousness that is very clear and pure.

This may need further clarification and explanation, which we can leave for our next session. With the remaining time we have now, people who may have some questions. If you have questions, please raise your hands.

Question: I can understand how we need to overcome attachment in order to cease cyclic existence. It seems easier with material objects, but when it comes to overcoming attachment in relationships, it seems very difficult. I suppose many others would find this difficult as well, so I am wondering if Geshe-la can give any particular advice on how to deal with attachment in relationships?

Answer: On a practical level, it seems important to keep in mind that overcoming attachment in relationships entirely is indeed difficult. It is not an easy thing initially. Since there is going to be attachment involved in relationships, it is important from the very beginning when the relationship is formed, to try to cultivate a sense of real caring and nurturing based on what we call compassion.

If that element can be brought in as well, the relationship seems to have a little bit more purpose in it, rather than just being based on just attraction. If there is a real sense of caring and nurturing based on compassion, that sort of relationship can have a little bit more meaning.

On a practical level, given that normal worldly relationships are based on attachment, with the understanding one has from a spiritual point of view, one can also pay attention to cultivating a sense of real caring, real nurturing based on compassion. This sort of relationship would not be just an ordinary kind of relationship. If one can cultivate compassion as attachment is already there, that relationship generally will be much more sustainable because of the fact that each side would be paying a little bit more attention to the other's interest and not focusing only on their own interest.

Contrast this to a relationship that is based only on attachment from both sides, on profound self-interest: 'What can I gain from this? How are my interests met?' Then the slightest thing that goes wrong that is not in one's own self interest will jeopardise that relationship. However, if the relationship is based on a bit of concern for the other's interest, even if one's own interest may not be met entirely, if one can see that it is benefiting the other, one can somehow be more patient and tolerant.

Even if the relationship doesn't last, if it has been based on a genuine sense of concern, when the relationship breaks up, while attachment is obviously gone, because there is a sense of compassion and caring, with the other's

interest still in one's mind, it seems to help both partners. If one partner goes into another relationship in which they are happy, their former partner would not feel so angry and jealous because they feel happy for them. On a practical note, I have seen situations where, even when the relationship is broken, there seems to still be a friendship and a good sense of caring for each other. Some people have mentioned that actually the relationship is much better that way.

Because of the difficulties that naturally occur in many relationships, I usually advise the younger generation who are new to relationships that perhaps it is good not to be hasty, but to take time to get to know each other before one makes a deep commitment. If one is hasty in entering a relationship and makes commitments and so forth, as natural difficulties arise, this will bring much suffering in the mind.

Also, it is good not to cling too much to the other. If both sides cling to each other, while it may seem a good formula for feeling secure, if the other is uncertain and from one's own side one has too much clinging or grasping for the other, then when the other shows signs of not so much interest or not wishing to make a commitment then that would bring distress in one's mind.

So it would be wise to really go slowly in making commitments to each other, and to take time for developing mutual caring and understanding.

On the practical level, if you start to really grasp and cling to your partner, if they were a genuinely understanding, kind person, they might take that as a good sign, thinking "My partner really cares for me". But if that were not the case, if the other person misinterprets or takes advantage of that, then the more you cling to them, the more they may abuse that and try to control you and get their own way.

When people approach me with these kinds of difficulties of separation and how to deal with it, to some I advise trying to take the attitude that if the other is walking away from you, you should turn away and walk away from them too. Rather than trying to pursue them, just walk away yourself and you can go your separate ways. This seems sometimes to help some people. I also say in jest that if you actually turn around and take your own path, you might meet up with many other good friends who are waiting for you!

I tell others that it is not as though you are losing anything – actually you are gaining your freedom. That seems to help some people think in a different light: rather than losing something, they are actually gaining freedom.

Some will actually say that it is actually rather boring to be with one person. Especially in relation to committed relationships like marriage, some people say it turns out to be quite boring having to live with one person and looking at them all the time. So, on a practical note, sometimes it may be for the better that one goes one's own way.

Maybe a brief question, a not too complicated one.

Question: In my case, it seems that my boyfriend has just become more controlling when I try to be compassionate to him, how can deal with such a situation?

Answer: As I mentioned earlier, there are situations like that, so it is necessary that one uses one's wisdom.

I think the main point is that being compassionate doesn't necessarily mean that one has to live with them and stay in the relationship. That is not what compassion means; rather, it is something beyond that.

As I mentioned, because situations like that occur, it is necessary to use one's wisdom and if necessary to stay separate. Because of the excuse of attachment and wanting to possess you, maybe they will even use threats to try to control you. Of course that does occur. When nations want to possess other nations, they use violence, wars and so forth to try to possess, subdue or conquer. Similarly, that can occur in relationships.

Sometimes it is useful to think on practical terms. There is nothing to really fear about the other person. They are similar to oneself, having one body, two arms, and two legs. If they are similar in build, one really does not need to give in to them. If they try to threaten you, you could maybe show them an aspect of threatening them as well!

I have told you this story in an earlier teaching. "I was staying at a school and had a friend, a young incarnate tulku. We were quite close. Normally he was a very quiet and gentle person, but one day, when we were out in the marketplace, I don't know what happened but he got into a small argument with some Indians. Before we knew what was going on, he must have hit someone. Suddenly there were about twenty people surrounding us and they were holding him by the wrists and the arms. In that situation, where there were only two of us and about twenty Indians who suddenly surrounded us, I pretended that I had a knife in my pocket. As I started to put my arm inside my robe and started to look fierce, all of them started to walk away. Then we quickly returned to the school."

The main point is that we do have certain amount of wisdom and it is good to use it in every situation that we find ourselves in.

I think we conclude for this evening. Before we conclude for the evening, we will take a few minutes in contemplation. This time, as we sit comfortably in an upright position, we focus on the mantra to be recited, Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. We then keep our attention focused on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed from tape by Judy Mayne
Edit 1 by Mary-Lou Considin
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version*

© Tara Institute