
The Condensed Lam Rim

༄༅། །བྱང་ལྷོ་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བརྒྱུག་པ་སྟེ། །

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

28 November 2007

As usual it would be good to spend some time for meditation. For that purpose we will sit in a relaxed upright position.

I should not need to stress the importance of having the correct motivation if one had already paid attention earlier when one recited the verses of taking refuge and generating bodhicitta. The recitation of those verses encompasses the proper motivation needed for one's practice because those verses encompass refuge and bodhicitta. Refuge is generated as a means to overcome adverse views or doctrines, and bodhicitta is generated to reverse any tendency towards the lower paths – where one merely seeks self-liberation – to seeking enlightenment for sentient beings.

It is important to generate a positive motivation or positive attitude so that whatever action we engage in becomes meaningful and fruitful. The practice of meditation is primarily done to gain a peaceful and happy mind: that's the ultimate purpose of meditation. If the initial motivation were improper or hostile, we would notice that any practice we subsequently engaged in, such as meditation, would not be fruitful.

The importance for our practice of generating a positive attitude is stressed in the Buddhist teachings. I take this advice even further for worldly activities, particularly relationships. To those having difficulties with relationships who confide in me and seek advice, I stress the importance of having a good motivation when you communicate. Communication is essential in strengthening a relationship. But prior to the communication, it is essential to generate a good motivation or attitude. If a good attitude is lacking at the outset, the communication may not bring about good results; it may even harm the relationship further. The purpose of communicating to bring a relationship together is so that the relationship will endure and become strong. But if good motivation is lacking, such communication becomes stressful and hostile, rather than calm and peaceful; it can become a hostile confrontation that can weaken the relationship and cause the two partners to become even further separated. The importance of good motivation is advice that I always share with my friends.

Good motivation is essential for having good relationships with others. A lack of good motivation is basically an attitude that is tinged with desire, anger or hatred – one that is based on selfish interest, desire or anger. If our communication or engagement with others is merely based on self-interest, self-centredness that comes from desire or anger, the result will be a strong

negative confrontation with the other. It disturbs not only your own mind but the minds of everyone else around you: everyone else is affected in that negative way. Thus an attitude of desire or hatred, contributes to real disturbance and conflict in the mind. We can experience no real calmness and peace from that.

In our normal everyday life, we can see many examples of confrontation caused through desire and anger. When we are communicating with others, if we sense that there is a strong self-centred interest or anger in our mind, there will also be hostility which is a mental state which leads to harming others. In the very act of harming others, we inevitably harm ourselves. There's never any peace in our own mind when we go out of our way to harm others. When we disturb others' minds, our own mind is disturbed as a consequence. No one feels relaxed and peaceful after having disturbed someone else's mind. The immediate consequence of disturbing someone else's mind is that one's own mind is disturbed. This is something we will have come to notice from our own experience.

How does this conflict and disturbance arise? First, the lack of a clear positive motivation leads to a negative attitude which influences the mind to be disturbed and agitated. When we are under the influence of an agitated mind, whatever activity we engage in will not be positive but troublesome, whether it's communicating or interacting in some other way with others. This troublesome activity then leads to further disturbance. So if our mind is initially unclear, not focused and lacking proper motivation, this can lead to lots of unwanted negative consequences, which lead to more disturbances.

However, when one's mind is focused and clear, one will be able to generate a positive attitude. This is where meditation comes into the picture: through the process of meditation, engaging in the practice of focusing the mind, the mind becomes clearer and more centred, enabling us to generate a positive attitude. Thus, if we want to have relative peace and happiness in our lives, it seems there is no choice but to engage in some practice of meditation.

Apart from taking the advice given here in the teaching, it would be good for you to come to this conclusion through your own analysis. Look into your own situation to see examples of where things have gone wrong, where whatever activity you engaged in was not fruitful, or where you were misunderstood or misinterpreted in your communication with others. There are times where we notice that whatever we do, somehow we don't get the positive result we want; rather, things seem to go wrong. Normally we are used to blaming external circumstances, however if we look further into those situations that have occurred in our life and identify the causes, we would come to notice that the real cause lies within oneself.

When one looks for the causes within oneself, one would notice that the difficulties or turmoil one is experiencing come from an agitated, disturbed mind. When one's mind is disturbed, everything one does becomes an upheaval, whether it's communicating with others or work activities. Having identified this, one can then look into whether it is possible to train oneself to induce a calm mind. If all the disturbance and difficulties we

experience have occurred from a disturbed, agitated mind, is it possible to have a relatively calm, peaceful, clearer, more focused mind? One needs to look into the advantages of the practice of meditation, the experience of a positive result from just a few minutes of meditation, to know that is possible. If one is able to identify that, one can reason with oneself that in order to gain a long-lasting positive result – a happier, more contented life – one needs to engage in the practice of meditation. Thus through self-analysis, one can get the determination to practise meditation.

For those of us who are ordinary beings, in our present situation we notice that the slightest thing will disturb us. Even the slightest thing going wrong, whatever it may be, causes one's mind to immediately become agitated and, as a result, one may speak negatively to others. Thus one's physical actions also become agitated. When we see the slightest external disturbance, our physical body, speech and mind become completely disturbed.

If that is the case right now and if one wants to overcome that situation, one needs to familiarise one's mind with the object of meditation, and engage in the practice of meditation regularly. Gradually, as we become more familiar with the practice, we will notice from our own experience that the same circumstances that disturbed us so easily earlier, will not have such an affect on us. Meeting those circumstances or objects that disturbed us previously no longer disturbs us to a great extent. When we notice that, it is said to be a clear sign of how the practice of meditation has helped us. If one can experience this, it will give our mind much joy and peace.

In this way, we can definitely see the difference between someone who engages in the practice of meditation and someone who does not pay any attention to the practice, or who even neglects it and does not see it as appropriate or useful. The afore-mentioned positive result – when certain objects do not disturb the mind as they did previously – does not come about from a so-called 'meditation practice' where one is content to merely close one's eyes, sit rigidly for a few minutes every day, and keep quiet for a while.

Even if such a person engaged in such a practice for many years, when they came out of that rigid posture and went out in the world, they would continue to meet many situations that would agitate them or make desire to arise in the mind continuously and intensely. When they came out of meditation and saw an object of desire they would immediately fall for it and be completely immersed in the object; or when they met an object of anger they would become completely angry and agitated. Thus there is not even a moment of benefit, no result at all, from that kind of practice.

For those of you engaged in a mutual relationship with a partner, if you become interested in the practice of meditation and practise it, your partner may not be so kind or may not have understood the real meaning of meditation if, as a result of having done the practice of meditation for many years you remain exactly the same or even more agitated. If you find yourself having more confrontations with your partner, then even if you try to convince your partner that the practice of meditation is

good, in fact in your actions you will have convinced him or her that it is not good. They may even say your practice of meditation has not brought any positive result, that it seems to have no benefit whatsoever.

On the other hand, if your practice brings about a positive result, where your attitude begins to change, where there was confrontation before, one can actually deal with such difficult situations with calmer mind and a more relaxed attitude – that would be the positive result that would convince your partner how the practise of meditation has benefited or helped. Then one's partner who may not have previously understood the value or significance of meditation practice would begin to see from their own side that meditation seemed to be very good for you, and would want your meditation to continue.

Thus we can see in a practical way that the practice of meditation will have not only benefited oneself but will have also benefited one's partner or friend. Not only has it helped to bring calmer and more peaceful state of mind for oneself, but it has also helped your partner be in a more relaxed, calm state of mind. However one's partner may start to get a little bit worried; there might be some concern because through one practising meditation, the other may think: 'My partner seems to be much more subdued and calm, maybe their desire has lessened and will not be interested in me any longer, so they may dump me!' (*laughter*)

The main point that I am emphasising here is how the practice of meditation should benefit one. It should be done in a proper way so that one will have a positive result, which will then have a good effect on others.

Having explained some of the benefits; we can now spend a few minutes in meditation. The meditation technique we do here is that, first, one need to make a very strong determination that for the next few minutes one will not allow the mind to be influenced by the distractions. One makes the mental decision to completely withdraw one's mind from the objects of distraction, external or internal, and bring one's full focus on the object of meditation, which in this case is our breath. As we focus on the natural inflow and outflow of our breath, we try to maintain a one-hundred-percent focus on that for the next few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*)

That should be sufficient for now, and so we will continue with the text.

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 strains 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

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.1.2.2. Explaining the sufferings of cyclic existence in particular

In the section of the text that we are covering now, the general topic is about explaining the particular sufferings of the each of the realms within cyclic existence. We are

now up to the sufferings of the worldly gods of the form and formless realm. As explained in the text, in this realm, of the three types of suffering, the worldly gods do not experience the first two types of suffering.

The text explains: The deities or worldly gods of the highest realms - form and the formless – though they escaped these sufferings, nevertheless die in possession of the afflictions and obscurations. Because they have no control over their future dwelling place, even they suffer on account of dysfunctional tendencies.

The text also quotes from one of the sutras called *Discussion of Requisite Collections*:

Those in the form and formless realms
Are beyond the suffering of pain and the suffering
of change,
By nature they have the bliss of meditative
concentration,
They remain motionless for an eon.

As explained in this verse, the gods of the form and formless realm do not have the suffering of pain and they are in the nature of the bliss of meditative concentration. The bliss of meditative concentration here is a mundane concentration where their mind is completely immersed in a worldly meditative state. Another text explains, these gods only have two types of awareness, in the beginning the awareness that they are born in that state, and at the end that they are dying. In between are completely absorbed in a meditative concentration called without discrimination.

The last line of the verse says that: 'They remain motionless for an eon', so the gods in the form and formless realm are in a mundane blissful meditative state and remain for eons in that state. However in the end they would have to again be reborn in the lower realms. Again the commentary continues to cite from the text, with the next verse saying:

But even this is most assuredly not liberation;
After they have counted on it, they will again fall.
Though it may seem as though they have transcended
The turbulence of the miserable realms,

Yet, like birds soaring in the sky,
They cannot stay forever, though they try,
Like an arrow shot with the strength of a child,
They will fall back down in the end.

As the text points out, even this is not absolute liberation and that after they have counted on it, they will again fall. What it means is that they have relied upon this meditative concentration as being a state of liberation. Even though it is not liberation, they mistakenly assume this is a state of liberation, because they do not experience any particular sufferings during that period. They are in that quite blissful state and assume that it is a state of liberation, but that is a mistaken assumption.

In fact when their karma to remain in that stage is exhausted and their lifespan comes to an end, they will have to take rebirth again. As mentioned here, they will again fall to a lower realm. The reason why some will fall into a lower realm is that when they see that their death is imminent, their mind is shocked to realise that they have not reached liberation and that they will have to face

death and fall again into a lower realm. When they realise that they have not obtained liberation, they actually develop a wrong view or a wrong conclusion in their mind that liberation is not possible at all – if what they had achieved was not liberation, then liberation must not be possible at all. Having come to this wrong conclusion, this wrong view will lead them to lower rebirth.

Also they have not been able to create any new positive karma as they have been completely absorbed in that mundane meditative state, where they have not been able to gain any further clear wisdom. In fact their wisdom becomes diminished because their mind is in a mundane concentrated state: they do not have the opportunity to acquire further spiritual wisdom or real intelligence, but rather just increase their ignorance.

That is also the reason why we emphasise the need for a clear mind in meditation and to understand the technique well; otherwise we may be just meditating on a sort of blankness that would just increase our ignorance. This is also the reason why these gods have not been able to create new positive karma: all the positive karma they have created in the past has been completely exhausted, and they fall into the lower realms again. The same part of the verse reads that, although it may seem that they have transcended the turbulence of the miserable realms, they fall again. The analogy, which is given next, shows that even though they feel that they have transcended the lower realms and have worked towards reaching a state of liberation, they have actually not achieved anything worthwhile.

The analogy is given in the next verse: 'Like birds soaring in the sky, they cannot stay forever though they try. Like an arrow shot with the strength of a child, they will fall back down and end.' This refers to the fact that, no matter how much strength a bird may have to soar in the sky for a long time, eventually they will get tired and fall down. Similarly an arrow shot by a weakling or a child may go up a certain distance, but will definitely fall down back to the earth.

The next verse gives another analogy:

Just as butter lamps that burn for a long time
Are in fact perishing in every moment,
They are afflicted by the changes of
The suffering of conditionality.

The analogy given here of the butter lamp is that, even though it may burn for some time, every moment that it burns it is actually getting closer to its finishing. The very fact that it is burning is actually bringing it nearer to extinguishment. Similarly, no matter how long the gods of the form and formless realm remain in their meditative state, they keep getting closer to the end, where they have to die and then fall into the lower realms. The second two lines say: 'they are afflicted by the changes of the suffering of conditionality'. As mentioned previously, even though they do not have the suffering of pain and the suffering of change, because they have the suffering of conditionality or the pervasive suffering, their very existence is in the nature of suffering. Also because of the dysfunctional tendencies, whatever good state they are in, they will have to perish and then they will have to again experience the suffering of the lower realms. Being

in that state is what is referred here as having the suffering of conditionality.

That covers the topics on seeing the faults of cyclic existence by contemplating on the sufferings of cyclic existence. To summarise this topic, we went through the particular types of sufferings and experiences of the five or six realms of existence.

What we try to derive from this for our personal practice is that by reflecting upon the various sufferings in the different realms – by hearing, thinking and analysing them – we should develop a sense of disenchantment or disgust towards all of the realms within cyclic existence. We should realise that wherever we may be born, in whatever conditions within cycle existence, as long as we are under the influence of the delusions and karma, we will have to undergo the various types of suffering. By contemplating that again and again, ultimately, it is said, this should induce a strong sense of feeling of renunciation – the strong wish to overcome these conditions and to free oneself from these conditions. That is the benefit in relation to oneself. Then, by contemplating the sufferings in relation to others, we should generate love, compassion and ultimately bodhicitta. We generate love and compassion by reflecting on the sufferings, and seeing how all other beings within cycle existence are undergoing immense suffering. By reflecting on that, we generate love and compassion towards them, wishing them to be free from the various sufferings.

Having reflected on the sufferings of cyclic existence and having seen the faults of cyclic existence, the next topic to be covered is reflecting on the cause of cyclic existence in terms of its origin – the origin of suffering. The next topic goes into detail about the actual origin of all the suffering.

The reason why the origin of the suffering is explained next is that it can be related to our own experience. When we experience any kind of suffering such as a disease or illness, we naturally want to overcome the illness and become well. But in order to do that, one would have to find out the cause of the illness. If we cannot find the cause ourselves, we will have to go to a doctor to identify the causes of that illness so that we can overcome it.

Thus it is appropriate that the next topic goes into the origin of all sufferings. In relation to a disease, if the origin or cause of the disease is not found, it will be very difficult to administrate a proper medication to overcome the illness. That is why it is very important to identify the cause of the illness.

One of the diseases that is hard to identify the causes of is cancer – it seems that is very difficult to identify the actual cause of cancers. After I escaped from Tibet and first entered India, the prevalent disease that seemed to scare everyone and that was a real concern was tuberculosis (TB). Some people were so concerned about getting the disease, they become extra hygienic and tried to wipe everything, for example, the chairs they were about to sit on. Later on we heard that there were cures and that it could be treated, so it was no longer seen as such a terminal disease. Of course, some people have actually perished or died from it, due to their karma, and

some are unable to be helped by medicine. But generally there seems to be a cure for tuberculosis.

So if we find a cure for cancer, there may be yet another disease that comes up that we cannot find a cure for. It seems that is nature. The Buddhist medical texts explain that there are 424 different kinds of diseases. What is useful for us to derive from this topic is that by reflecting or meditating on these sufferings, we should try to generate a feeling of disenchantment towards cyclic existence – a feeling of what we call renunciation, particularly a determination to obtain liberation or nirvana first in relation to oneself and then in relation to others by generating love and compassion.

It is good to think along these lines. In a practical sense, liberation can also refer to freedom from general kinds of suffering, such as diseases and so forth. If we experienced certain kinds of disease and suffered from them, we would definitely have a very strong wish to be free from that disease and would want to overcome that suffering. But as we find the means to overcome it and begin to succeed, if we see others with the same disease, we would naturally have sympathy towards them because of having experienced it oneself; we would naturally want others to be free from that kind of disease and suffering.

It seems that if we have experienced or reflected on suffering ourselves, it can definitely help to induce a sense of caring and nurturing love and compassion towards others as well. As we reflect in this way and induce a wish for others to be free from suffering, we can start by focusing on someone who is ill and wish them to be free, then expand that view, for example, viewing a hundred people who are sick and wishing them to be free from that kind of illness. That wish in our mind is said to be a very noble wish; by just having that thought in our mind, we will purify negative karma and accumulate great merit. So this becomes a very beneficial practice for us. When we think about how this practice can benefit us in this practical way, we can see the significance of reflecting upon suffering.

Before we conclude for the evening, let us again spend a few minutes for meditation, this time focusing our mind on the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra, and distancing our mind from all distractions, keeping our mind focused on the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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