
The Condensed Lam Rim

༄༅། །བྱང་ཆུབ་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བཞུགས་སོ། །

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

21 May 2008

As usual it would be good to spend some time in meditation. For that, we sit in a relaxed and appropriate posture. We also assume a relaxed frame of mind and generate a positive motivation, such as recalling the great benefit and purpose of meditation. As we regularly mention, some of the benefits of the practice of meditation are that one acquires a clear focused mind, a good awareness and a peaceful mind.

These benefits are something we all definitely wish to acquire – a clear, focused and peaceful mind. The technique of meditation brings about these results when we withdraw the mind from all external distractions, then focus it on a chosen internal object and keep the mind focused on that.

The main purpose of meditation practice is training the mind to become more and more familiar with the positive. From our own everyday experience we can relate to instances when the mind is relatively calm, relaxed and positive. When we have a positive attitude, we will notice how it brings about a calmer, happier and more joyful mind. On the contrary, when our mind is preoccupied with many different thoughts and ideas in relation to worldly things, we will notice that there is an underlying agitation in the mind, and it is vulnerable to anxiety and problems. This is something which we can notice through our own experience. Thus from our own experience we can see that the practice of meditation is basically to familiarise the mind with being in a positive state, and as we do this more frequently, it will bring about a peaceful mind.

The particular type of meditation we do here is withdrawing our mind from distractions, and focusing on an internal object: our own breath. When we do this practice wholeheartedly, with all our attention, because we are giving our full attention to focusing on the breath, it becomes an antidote to our disturbed, distracted mind. In order to focus on the breath, we have to withdraw our focus from other objects: our focus on ideas and thoughts of other objects has to be completely withdrawn. Although the technique of focusing on the breath is not an antidote for overcoming disturbing conceptions altogether, it does temporarily free our mind from disturbing conceptions and thoughts, so there definitely is a benefit from this practice.

Having sat in an appropriate posture, before engaging in the practice, we must intentionally withdraw our mind from all other thoughts and ideas, temporarily leaving them aside and bringing our focus and attention fully onto the breath. By focusing on the natural rhythm of the breathing, the inflow and outflow of the breath, we fix

our focus on that and try to maintain it there for the next few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*)

That should be sufficient for now. Just as we attempted to do a short meditation now, likewise it would be good to spend some time every day to regularly practise meditation. This technique helps us to generate a strong awareness and mindfulness in our mind, which helps to detect the arising of positive and negative attitudes. When one is able to detect that, one can become a master for oneself – as the Buddha himself has mentioned, “*One is one’s own protector*”. What the Buddha was indicating is that one is actually one’s own protector when one is in the right state of mind. This means that when one detects a negative state of mind one tries to avert it or minimise it and generate a positive state of mind. That is how the awareness we develop helps us to maintain tranquillity in our mind, thus protecting the mind from experiencing problems.

When we really take some time to look within, we will begin to detect the different states of our mind and how they function. We will begin to really notice that choosing to engage in good conduct or negative behaviour is actually entirely in one’s own hands, so to speak. Though external factors like friends and so forth may have some influence over us, ultimately it is our own decision. We would be able to clearly identify the fact that it is one’s own decision whether one wants to follow a negative attitude and engage in negative behaviour, or whether one chooses to adopt a positive attitude and engage in positive behaviour.

Whenever His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, engages in public teachings, you will always hear that his main advice is to be a good person, a well-respected person. That is something we need to strive to achieve. If we decide that we want to spend our life in accordance with good conduct and respectful behaviour in order to be considered a respectful person, we might not initially have the capacity or skills to identify the difference between good behaviour and wrong behaviour. So long as we remain in a state of not knowing clearly what is good or bad, we are still vulnerable to the influence of others.

Thus if we decide that we want to have a respectful and good life, we must seek a virtuous friend. The Buddhist teachings emphasise reliance on a virtuous friend, which can also mean a teacher. Relying on a virtuous friend or teacher is in accordance with one’s decision of wanting to lead a respectful life and engaging in good conduct, for if one does not rely on a virtuous friend, one is very likely to be influenced by negative friends who influence us to engage in non-virtuous activities. When we begin to understand that, we can relate to the importance of relying on a virtuous friend.

The great master of ancient Tibet, Padampa Sangye, has mentioned that if we rely on beings who are sages, meaning great teachers, our conduct will accordingly become positive. If we rely on non-virtuous people, likewise our conduct will most likely be influenced to be non-virtuous. Padampa Sangye is pointing out that it is most essential for us to rely on a virtuous friend, spiritual master or teacher while we are still ignorant i.e. for as

long as we lack the full capacity to distinguish between good and bad conduct ourselves.

Of course, we can understand this in the context of leading a spiritual life, a life enriched with spiritual values and good conduct. But even if we were to take a worldly example, it is clear that if we rely on good friends – those who study well and so forth – we would naturally follow their good example. However, if we were to be surrounded by people who engage in bad conduct, we could see how we could be easily influenced by them. So in worldly activities, as in Dharma or spiritual activities, we can see the necessity of relying on virtuous or good friends.

I often stress the point that we need to generate good attitudes ourselves, and those with whom we associate in our daily lives, such as our friends or partners. It is important that we try to relate to them with a positive attitude. In our daily lives when we relate to others, it is important that we seek their positive qualities so that we can also develop those qualities within ourselves. For instance, if someone is compassionate and has great concern for others, we should allow ourselves to be influenced by their good heart, compassionate attitude and concern for others. If we allow ourselves to be inspired by them, we will most likely also begin to get those qualities ourselves.

But if we were to just focus on their faults, because our mind is preoccupied with their faults – being short-tempered, greedy, and so forth – it is most likely that we end up acquiring those faults too. Even if one may not have considered oneself to be short-tempered or greedy, by focusing on these in relation to one's friends or relatives, one will also attain those negative qualities. That is why I stress that it is very important in your association with others to pay attention to their good qualities and try to be inspired by those, rather than focusing on their negative qualities. If one sees negative qualities such as jealousy or anger, one needs to protect oneself. There is no need to pick on or criticise others; rather than criticising them, one has a responsibility to protect oneself. Even if a friend or acquaintance has some negative qualities, one is not likely to be influenced by these if one has protection. Otherwise, you may find yourself in circumstances where you have lived with someone for a long time and have focused only on their negative side. Then if you were to separate from them, you may start manifesting these qualities yourself. Suddenly you become short-tempered, greedy and so forth, manifesting those very faults that you criticised the other as having.

Thus when the teachings advise us to rely upon virtuous friends and avoid negative or non-virtuous friends, this means that when one has relationships with others, one focuses on their good qualities, as mentioned previously, and tries to aspire to increasing those good qualities within oneself. This benefits us. When the teachings mention avoiding non-virtuous friends, one must not take this literally and begin disowning or discarding negative friends. Rather the meaning is that we should not follow their example of negative tendencies. Rather than scorning them and being upset with them, we

should develop even more compassion for them because of the harm they are creating for themselves.

One needs to understand that disregarding negative friends should not be taken literally, but rather understand that this means to avoid the influence of their negative attributes. It is easy to misinterpret the advice avoid 'negative friends'. For someone who is quite intelligent the question may immediately arise in their mind: 'Does that mean I should not love them and have concern for them? What about the teachings that say one should have concern and love for all sentient beings? Does one actually leave out negative friends and not show any concern and love to them at all?' That doubt may arise if one takes the meaning of this teaching literally.

Perhaps a more serious misinterpretation one can get from this teaching is that one should seek out a 'perfect friend'. In relation to our worldly friends and associates, trying to find a perfect friend who does not have any faults would be completely unrealistic. One would have to be entirely without faults oneself to find a friend without faults. So, as an ordinary person oneself with faults, it is likely that our associates and friends will also have faults. But then it would also be unrealistic to focus only on their faults – as everyone also has some good qualities.

Thus in our relationship with others, from our side we must try to focus on their attributes, either be inspired by their good qualities or inspire them with our own good qualities. If we mutually seek out and appreciate the good qualities in each other, that would be the most practical and positive way of relating to each other. While being inspired by their good qualities, at the same time we should work on eliminating our negative qualities. When we see negative qualities in others we should relate to that by thinking: 'OK, he or she is a human being. I may also have certain faults; just as I have to accept those in myself, I will accept that person as well with their negative attributes'. With that acceptance, both will be able to manage the relationship and can live together. In that way, the relationship will be mutually beneficial. Thus having a realistic outlook in a relationship is most beneficial.

We did not refer to the text in the last session. Of course, you may wish to ask some questions that you may have, if they are relevant, but we can also go over the text. Either relating to the text or addressing your questions are both relevant for our practice. When I relate to a point that may be useful to our lives, I am relating to you as if we were part of the same family. I don't have an attitude of feeling superior or feeling separate and looking down to give you advice. Rather I am sharing these essential points that I think might be useful in daily life in the hope that it will be beneficial to you.

As I have said previously, I do not claim to have superior knowledge that I can share with you. It is not as if I have some great wisdom that I can share and divide amongst you and that you can take home. That is not possible. It is not as if I have any great wisdom to bestow on you. However in our gathering here, as I emphasised earlier, if we conduct it with a good attitude both from your side as

well as from my side – a good attitude meaning an attitude of concern for each other, then it would be beneficial. From within that frame of mind, when I share something with you, based on that good motivation there can be some benefit. Because I don't claim any superior wisdom and so forth, I also don't have any fear that I will lose anything or that there will be any fault in sharing that experience. In that way, I also feel relaxed in my mind. If one had the idea that one had great knowledge, there would be a danger of feeling proud. So I am protected from that delusion.

Does anyone have a question?

Question: If the [Tibetan] word *sherab* means wisdom of telling the difference between things, what does the word *yeshé* mean? In Tibetan does that mean wisdom realising emptiness? Or is there another word for wisdom understanding emptiness? They all seem to be translated as 'wisdom' in English, but there seem to be at least two or three Tibetan words for different types of wisdom.

Translator: So basically you mean the difference between *sherab* and *yeshé*?

Answer: Of course even in Tibetan, there are two different terms which sound the same but relate to two different things: *yeshé* and *yishe*. One could easily mistake those two, since they sound very similar. *Yeshé* is maybe loosely translated as 'wisdom' but more specifically it would mean 'primordial or exalted wisdom'. That is a specific type of wisdom that only the aryas or noble beings have. That would be the wisdom realising emptiness. Whereas *yishe* refers to mental consciousness: within the different types of consciousness we have, the mental consciousness is referred to as *yishe*. Consciousness is generally divided into two: the sense consciousness and the mental consciousness and *yishe* refers to mental consciousness. I hope that helps to answer your question.

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

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2. Reflection on the causes of suffering – the faults of cyclic existence

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.1. How afflictions or delusions arise

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.1.2. Identifying the afflictions

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.1.2.1. Non-speculative afflictions

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.1.2.1.2. Pride

We will just cover a few points from the text. In our last session, we were on the topic of describing the different types of delusions: the delusions being divided into five views or speculative delusions, and five non-views or non-speculative delusions. Within the five non-views, we had covered the first two and were in the process of explaining the non-speculative delusion called pride. What pride is and the disadvantages of pride have been explained in our previous sessions.

As pride clearly harms us, what kind of meditation and attitudes can help serve as an antidote to pride? The attitude of pride arises with a feeling of superiority in relation, for example, to knowledge. With pride one feels pompous about having great knowledge, so the antidote

is focusing on certain aspects of something that we may not entirely know about. Referring to topics with which one is not yet acquainted will help to reduce pride.

For example, we may have pride in our body but when we go into the subtleties of our body, there are many internal parts that we are not aware of. So even in relation to one's own body, when one investigates and analyses it, one would come to realise there are many parts that one does not know well. This example is just in relation to one's body. If someone feels that they are skilled in driving and think they know everything about driving, then I tell them to try flying an aeroplane. That person who is not skilled in piloting an aeroplane but who has much pride in knowing how to drive a car will realise that there are other mechanical things with which they are not familiar and don't how to run. So that pride of knowing everything about cars and being able to drive well will actually be reduced.

In relation to our body, those who have studied some psychology will have learned about the terms for different parts of the brain. Apparently, there are many parts in the brain that can be differentiated from each other and have different functions, something that we are normally not aware of. So we don't even know about the different subtleties of our brain and in relation to our own body, there are definitely certain parts – just as with our brain – we don't know much about. I have heard that there are hundreds of different parts in the brain. So that in itself is just incredible.

To conclude the topic of pride, relating to different aspects of knowledge that we are not acquainted with will help to reduce one's pride. One's feeling of superiority will begin to reduce, which will help the mind to become calm and peaceful. As mentioned previously in other sessions, when relating to the disadvantages of pride, for as long as our mind is preoccupied with pride, it will prevent us from acquiring more knowledge and we will also have a feeling of contempt in relation to others, so others will not regard us well. But if one doesn't have pride in one's mind, our mind will become calmer, more settled and balanced. With this understanding, one will try to work on reducing pride within oneself.

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.1.3. Ignorance

The next delusion in the series is ignorance. The Tibetan word for ignorance is *ma-rigpa*. *Ma* is a negative and *rigpa* has the connotation of knowing or knowledge. So, when you add the *ma* to *rigpa*, it becomes 'not-knowing', or the opposite of knowing or intelligence. The literal meaning of *ma-rigpa* or ignorance is 'that which obstructs knowledge or intelligence'.

The definition of ignorance given in the text is 'an afflicted and unclear mental factor that obstructs the mind from knowing the nature of the Four Noble Truths, karma and its effects, the Three Jewels'. Thus, in relation to the definition given, ignorance is a state of mind or mental factor which, by its nature, is afflicted and unclear. Having an afflicted, unclear state of mind obstructs the mind from knowing phenomena – not allowing the mind to relate to the object with clarity, or to know the actual nature of the object. The examples given are not knowing the nature of the Four Noble Truths,

which are the basic essential teachings of the Buddha; not knowing karma or the law of cause and effect; not knowing the Three Jewels, and so forth. So not knowing or being unclear about the nature of these phenomena is what ignorance does to one's mind.

The next delusion is doubt, 'deluded doubt' which we will refer to in our next session. Before we conclude for the evening, if you can again take a few more minutes for contemplation, this time while the mantra of Buddha Shakyamuni is being recited we keep our mind focused on the sound of 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