
The Condensed Lam Rim

༄༅། །བྱུང་རྒྱུ་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བཞུགས་པོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

6 August 2008

As usual it would be good to spend some time in meditation. For that purpose, you may sit in a relaxed, appropriate and comfortable position.

As we stress regularly, it is also important to have a good motivation and to think about the main purpose of engaging in the practice of meditation. We should remind ourselves that the main purpose of practising meditation is to have a controlled, subdued and peaceful mind so that we can benefit others.

Looking at the benefits of the practice of meditation, we can particularly relate to the benefit of training our mind to focus its energy so that it has more power to accomplish whatever we wish. We can all understand the need to focus our mental energy and to use it constructively, rather than allowing the mind to remain scattered and distracted. At the moment, we cannot utilise the full potential of our mind because it is diverted in many different directions by various distractions. But if we were able to focus all of our mental energy into one thing at a time, we would be able to utilise the mind's full potential.

To use a worldly example of the disadvantages of a scattered mind, we can look at our work environment. When we engage in a certain task, if our mind is preoccupied with many other thoughts, we will notice that we are not able to accomplish the task properly. But if our mind were focused on the task at hand, we would be able to accomplish it effectively.

So even in a worldly context, in a work or study environment, we can clearly see that anyone whose mind is constantly distracted by other thoughts and ideas is not able to utilise their full mental potential, because their mind is scattered. On the contrary, someone who is able to focus and keep their attention on a given task, whether work or study, will be able to accomplish it well and be successful.

We can see a definite benefit, even in a worldly context, of an attentive, focused mind. When someone lacks focus, they don't accomplish their tasks effectively. If this tendency for the mind to be scattered continues, that individual would find that in whatever they attempted to do, they would not find much success. They will not be able to accomplish their goals because they constantly feel the compulsion to do something else. Even within a worldly context, such a person will develop low self-esteem and may come to a point where they will not really want to engage in any activity because they don't feel they are able to accomplish it.

The main point I am stressing is the importance of having a focused mind that is attentive to the task at hand, whatever it may be. When we have a focused, attentive mind, we will be able to accomplish whatever we set out to do, and there will be a great benefit in our everyday life.

When we look at our lives closely, we will notice that we have made many mistakes due to our lack of focus and attention. A lot of the faults that we detect in our lives have come about because of a lack of attention, or focused mind.

When we are able to clearly see this and accept the fact that a focused and attentive mind is essential to accomplishing whatever we set out to do, we will start developing a keen interest in techniques that will help us to have a focused and attentive mind. This is where meditation comes in. Meditation is basically a unique technique for developing a focused and attentive mind.

When we accept the fact that a lack of focus is destroying our attempts to accomplish even our worldly goals, we will be able to understand the greater importance of a focused and attentive mind in pursuing our spiritual goals. Whether one is spiritually inclined or not, or whether one has a keen wish to practice the dharma or not is a personal matter: some are more inclined than others to pursue a spiritual path.

Even if we're not that keen to pursue a spiritual path, it is good to recognise the need for a clear, focused mind in enabling us to accomplish the necessities for a happy, healthy life. The essential things we wish to accomplish in life, whatever it may be, cannot be achieved with a scattered and completely distracted mind. As a great master has mentioned, in the same way that someone weakened by a lot of physical illness will not be able to accomplish physical activities, when the mind is afflicted by many different distractions, it will not have the energy and power to accomplish any task it is presented with. When we look at our own experience, we can see that this is true: a scattered mind prevents us from accomplishing our goals effectively.

When we use the technique of meditation to strengthen and empower our mind, making it clear, attentive and focused, we will see the benefits of meditation. Regardless of whether we had a spiritual inclination or not, we would see the practical benefit of meditation in contributing to our overall well-being. Thus meditation becomes a practical technique that can benefit anyone.

Through our practice of meditation, as we strengthen our mental focus and clarity, we will be able to protect our mind from adverse circumstances. This means we will also be protecting our mental well-being and happiness. This is essential. If we were to have an unhappy mind, that would in turn affect our whole life and well-being. When our mind lacks happiness, whatever we do will not be fruitful, and our whole life will be tainted. Whereas a happy mind is the most valuable, worthwhile possession we can have. Thus protecting the happiness of the mind is most important: we must pay attention to it.

The technique of meditation serves to protect our mental well-being and happiness. To give yet another example of

how important a focused and attentive mind is even in worldly pursuits such as study and work, I have a story. I have related this story before, but I will again mention this experience that occurred when I was studying in the Sanskrit University in Sarnath. There was a student who was known to be very bright and who knew Sanskrit well. However, on the day of the exam, he actually did very poorly, partly perhaps because he was overconfident, but mainly because he was not really attentive. In contrast, some of us who were new students did quite well in the exam because we really paid attention and focused well. Even though this bright student had the knowledge, he was not able to do well on the exam because he was not focused; he didn't really pay attention at the time of the exam.

Having explained the benefits, we will now engage in the practice of meditation for the next few minutes. So, we can reassess our physical posture and pay particular attention to having a conducive mind-set, withdrawing our mind from all internal and external distractions. For the duration of the meditation, it's as if we cut ourselves off from all ideas, thoughts, plans and so on; we just leave them aside, bringing our attention and focus within.

To maintain this state of mind free from distractions, it is important that we have something on which to focus. Without an object to focus on, it is hard to stabilise the mind. The object we use here is our breathing: observing the natural rhythm of the inflow and outflow of our breath is the actual object. While keeping our focus on the breath, we also remain diligent in making sure that our mind does not get distracted again. If we notice that it gets distracted, we bring the focus back onto the breath and try to maintain it for as long as possible on the natural rhythm of the breathing. In that way, we will spend the next few minutes just observing our breath. *[Pause for meditation]*

I have to continue with my task of explaining a bit from the text, so you can continue with your meditation when you go back home *[Geshe-la laughs]*!

Just as we have attempted in our short session now, if we can regularly put some time into training our mind through the practice of meditation, the practical benefit we can get from that is that we will gain a focused mind. That really seems to be an essential element for our well-being and success in whatever activity we undertake. As mentioned previously, if we wish to accomplish something, if we want to be successful, it is essential that we have an attentive and focused mind. Whether one sees the direct relationship with meditation or not, that point is something we can all agree with. If we can gain that understanding and intelligence – of the importance of having a focused and attentive mind – this will encourage us in our life.

Once we fully accept that an attentive and focused mind is essential in our life, we can determine to make our environment conducive to this. This means that if others tend to distract us, we try to avoid that situation, or we try to let them know that we need to be focused and attentive in a certain task. Most importantly, if we have distractions within our own mind that divert our attention from the task at hand, it's good to remind

ourselves: 'This is an obstacle; this is what will hinder me from accomplishing what I am doing.' Re-asserting to ourselves that we need to maintain a focused and attentive mind will be beneficial.

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

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.1.1. Identifying the afflictions

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.1.2. The stages in which delusions arise

In presenting the topic from the text, we have come to the point of explaining the causes of the delusions. Earlier, the delusions or the negative emotions were identified, what they are. Next, the sequence of how the delusions arise in the mind was explained.

Now this particular point, even though it's not a specific sub-heading from the text that we are referring to, it does follow the logical order of next explaining the causes of the delusions.

The first cause that is explained is 'the basis'. The text explains that the basis refers to either the 'seed' or 'root' of delusions, or it can be a latency in our mind. A seed of a delusion or negative emotion is said to be that which has the potential to regenerate a similar attitude or negative mind in the future. So the seed is that potential within us that carries the ability to produce a similar negative state of mind in the future. The latency of a delusion is slightly different: to take the example of anger, even though anger is not manifest in our mind and we are not at the moment angry, under the surface there is a slight agitation or unpleasantness that has not yet manifested. When the right conditions are met, it will immediately manifest. So latency is basically a state of our mind under the domain of anger or desire and, even though it's not manifest, at any given moment when the conditions are right, it will become manifest.

To summarise the basis of the delusions, for as long as we have the basis of the delusions in our mind, unfailingly there will be a future time for the delusions to arise in the mind. This will occur either because we have the seed of the delusion or because the delusion is latent in our mind. For as long as we are in that condition of either having the seeds or dormant delusions in the mind, even though the delusions such as anger or desire may not be manifest and we may not express them right now, when the conditions come together for us to become upset or to feel desire, immediately we will experience that state of mind of anger or desire.

We can take particular instances when we feel a little bit on the edge; we may not even notice it. We're not particularly angry, but when we go out and engage with others, all it takes is for someone to maybe show an awkward face to us and then we become agitated. This is a case of the anger being dormant; it's just under the surface and ready to manifest at any given moment.

We can use the analogy of a stomach illness caused by infection by a microorganism. When the symptoms are manifest, we experience pain and discomfort. After a certain time, we may not actually experience the immediate symptoms of pain and discomfort, but if we have not actually cured the disease and eliminated the cause, the slightest condition such as consuming food that is disagreeable to the stomach will immediately cause cramps and pains again. So the fact that we don't experience the immediate symptoms does not mean we are not prone to experiencing them when we meet the conditions. To be free from the symptoms entirely, we would have to cure the disease itself. This is likened to the seed of delusion in our mind. Until the seed of delusion has been removed from our mind, whenever we meet with the conditions, we will experience the delusions arising.

If we don't understand this well, there is a danger that because we have been doing meditation for some time and delusions such as anger or desire have not arisen, we might believe 'Maybe I've overcome anger/desire. I've actually cured myself from anger/desire'. However, as soon as we come out of meditation and we are presented with certain conditions, we might experience those negative states of mind such as anger or desire. What happens during the meditation is that the delusions actually become dormant; it's not as if we have overcome the delusions, but during the period of meditation the delusions are latent and thus we don't experience them.

When we talk about the benefit of overcoming delusions such as desire, there are some who claim that without desire, how could one experience any joy or bliss? From our experience of meditation we know that when we withdraw our mind from distractions and intentionally subdue our mind by completely focusing on the appropriate object, the delusions subside. The manifest level of the delusions such as anger and desire subside and as a result we experience some sort of joy and well-being within ourselves, don't we? That experience is an indication that if we can experience a certain amount of joy, bliss and tranquillity just from subduing the delusions temporarily, how much more bliss and joy would we experience if we were to uproot the delusions completely from the mind. The joy and bliss would be much greater.

The next cause of the delusions indicated in the text is the object. If one were to ask what kinds of objects become a cause for the delusions to arise in the mind, they would be categorised as either attractive or repulsive. When one comes into contact with attractive or repulsive objects, this becomes an immediate condition for delusions to arise.

For example, when one comes into contact with an attractive object, that then becomes a condition for attachment to arise in the mind. When one comes into contact with a repulsive object, then that becomes a condition for agitation and anger to arise. Likewise, other delusions similarly arise in relation to their respective objects.

However, merely coming in contact with the object is not the main cause or the only condition for delusions such as

desire or attachment to arise – the basis of the delusion discussed earlier is the main cause. We still have the basis of the delusions in the form of their seeds, which are dormant in our mind. Because of that, when we come into contact with the object, this becomes the immediate condition for the particular delusion to arise in our mind.

As a great master mentions in the text called *Valid Cognition* or the *Abhidharma*, because of these three conditions – not having uprooted the delusions from our mind, being in close proximity to the objects, and having a contrived state of mind that sees things opposite to how they are – the delusions arise in our mind. That is how it is. If we have not uprooted the delusions, then when we are in close proximity to the object of delusions, the delusions will arise. However, if we didn't have the third condition, we could control ourselves a bit. But the third condition is the contrived mind that misinterprets or sees the object in an erroneous way, which is also one of the factors causing the delusions to arise in the mind.

As explained earlier, having the seed of a delusion such as desire within our mind is the basic condition. When the other two conditions are intact – meeting with an object and having the contrived or faulty state of mind that sees the object as overly attractive when in reality it is not that way – delusions such as desire will unfailingly arise in our mind.

Here we can make a distinction between someone who has uprooted the delusion from their mind and meets an attractive object versus someone who still has the seed of delusion in their mind and meets an attractive object. When someone who has uprooted the seed of delusions from their mind comes in contact with an attractive object, they will see the characteristics of attractiveness on the object and will still see it as a beautiful object, but they will not have attachment or desire arising in relation to that object. Whereas when someone who still has the seed of delusion in their mind comes into contact with the object, they will see the object as being extremely attractive and beautiful, and on top of that, a strong desire or longing to possess that object will arise in the mind.

Seeing the actual characteristics of the object as attractive or not, is not the main fault; rather the fault is that the seed of delusion is still intact in our mind and causes the desire or anger to arise. This is an important point to reflect on.

As the great masters have mentioned in the mind training teachings, for someone who is a beginner, it is difficult to initially uproot the delusions from our mind entirely through our practice. That is something which would take prolonged, persistent practice for many years, even lifetimes. However, we can manage to distance ourselves from the objects that cause delusions to arise in the mind. In fact, as one of the great Kadampa masters has mentioned, the practice of keeping a distance is much more effective for a beginner. Rather than trying to combat a delusion in our mind, we can distance ourselves from the object that causes the delusion to arise: that is a more effective practice.

This is why an ordained monk or nun is advised to live initially in isolation, so that they can avoid coming in

contact with objects that serve as a cause for delusions to arise. If one practices and strengthens one's mind so that one is able to overcome the delusions while living in isolation, one could come back into a worldly environment and be able to deal with situations in the outside world more effectively.

For example, we notice from our own experience that when we have the object of attraction in front of us, or even if we visualise that object and try to meditate on overcoming desire, it becomes really quite unmanageable. It seems impossible, because as soon as we see the object of attraction, desire for that object spontaneously arises in our mind. Therefore, rather than trying to meditate on the faults of the object, it is best to avoid coming into contact with the object for our practice at the beginning. That will help us minimise the delusions such as desire. For an object of anger, if we try to avoid coming into contact with it, it will help anger to subside in our mind.

It would be another matter if you were actually able to gain something worthwhile from being with the object of attraction – for instance, someone wishing to have a committed relationship with another person they are attracted to. However, if one is not seriously committed to that person, it is best to avoid coming into contact with them. If we were to come into contact with them, the feeling of desire towards them would just get stronger and stronger. Likewise it's the same with anger; being close to the object just causes disturbance in our mind. Thus in order for our practice to be consistent and to try to minimise the delusions such as desire in our mind, it is best to try to intentionally avoid contact with the object. This will help to control the mind.

A stanza from the text called *The 37 Practices of a Bodhisattva* – written by the great master Gyelsay Togmay Sangpo – mentions the benefit of living in isolation, or maintaining an isolated environment. As mentioned in the verse, by intentionally avoiding distractions and remaining in an isolated environment, one finds that the immediate conditions for delusions to arise in the mind are minimised. Because there are no immediate objects of distraction, the mind becomes much more subdued. As the mind becomes subdued, it seems to become more clear and focused. With that renewed mental focus and clarity, one is able to put effort and energy into acquiring positive states of mind. To practice in that way, in isolation, is the way of a bodhisattva.

As instructed in these teachings, it seems to be the case for us as beginners that having an isolated environment is much more conducive for our practice. In fact, leaving aside people earnestly following a spiritual path, even ordinary people seem to have that feeling of wanting to remain quite isolated when things become too much for them. I met a business person who had wealth and everything else going for him in his life, but he confided in me with all sincerity and honesty that he had had enough of troubles and problems and distractions, and that he would really like to go out in isolation and live somewhere peaceful and quiet. But he also said that it seemed very difficult to achieve that! [*Geshe-la laughs*]

As the teachings point out, when we are in contact with objects that cause delusions to arise in the mind, it seems very difficult for the mind to remain firm, steady and focused. Whether that's true or not is something for you to check up on.

I have another story in relation to that. Before I came here, when I was appointed as a teacher at Chenrezig Institute in Queensland, I had a lay translator who was not ordained, called Dawa. During the Sydney teachings recently in June, when His Holiness was teaching in English, Dawa was the translator who translated into Tibetan for the Tibetans. Anyhow Dawa had a girlfriend whom I knew – she's of Italian origin I think and they seemed to have a good relationship. I knew she was coming to the teachings but I did not see her there, so later I asked her, 'Weren't you at the teachings?' She said, 'Yes, I was at the teachings'. I said, 'I didn't see you. Where were you sitting?' She said, 'Oh, I sit in the corner behind a pillar so that Dawa doesn't see me, because if he sees me, he becomes completely distracted'. [*Laughter*] She was definitely relating her own feelings and experiences very honestly, whether that was the case for Dawa or not! Because of her own experience, she assumed that was the case for Dawa as well.

Summarising the main points here, even though we may not be able to overcome the delusions entirely in our mind right now, we can still minimise the circumstances for the delusions to arise by avoiding the objects. The teaching will describe further details of how to minimise circumstances for delusions to arise in the mind. That is something that is within our capacity; we can do that. Those reasonable practices we can adopt are something that we must pay attention to.

One may have the doubt: 'How could I ever be associated with anyone who is not an object of distraction? How could I possibly meet someone or be with someone who does not become an object for a delusion to arise? That is not possible'. In response to that, the teaching will present tips for how to deal with this in our lives.

The uniqueness of the teaching is that it actually brings up all the queries and doubts that we may have in our mind, and gives the appropriate answer to each. When we notice that unique feature of the teaching, we can develop a strong conviction in their effectiveness.

Before we conclude for the evening, let us again spend a few minutes in contemplation. This time we will focus on the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed from tape by Peter Boothby
Edit 1 by Mary-Lou Considine
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version*

© Tara Institute