

---

## The Condensed Lam Rim

# ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བརྒྱུག་པོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

3 September 2008

---

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

The next important point for the practice of meditation is setting our motivation. When we engage in any action, the preceding thought is crucial in determining whether the action is worthwhile or not. That is the case for any action we engage in, including the practice of meditation. If we have a positive motivation prior to engaging in meditation or other activity, it ensures that when we actually engage in that activity, our mind will be more settled and relaxed and thus more focused. It is good to understand that when we engage in any activity, if we have a positive frame of mind before engaging in the action, it is likely to be fruitful.

There are many elaborate explanations of how one can generate a positive motivation. However, to keep it simple and precise, we should generate a motivation based on these two principles: to ensure that at the very least, one's action will not cause harm to others, and at best that one's action will actually benefit others. Even though it may sound simple, this advice encompasses the essential points of non-harmfulness or non-violence towards others, and a sense of love and compassion. The essential elements of buddhist practice are combined into these two main points.

If we ensure that our frame of mind is in this state, with those two essential points intact, when we engage in any activity and notice that it is harmful to others, we will naturally put every effort into trying to refrain from that activity. And if we find that an action benefits others, we will ensure that we increase that activity. This approach is essential for ensuring we live a meaningful life.

With an ordinary state of mind, even if we notice that an action is harmful to others, we may find we are not able to refrain from it. Even if it is clearly harmful to others, we may not be able to stop doing those actions. Likewise although we may know that another action is clearly beneficial to others, we may find we are not able to readily engage in that action. If we find this is the case for us, the reason is that we do not have the training. The essential point here is that, in order to engage in positive activities that are beneficial to others and refrain from negative actions that harm others, one needs the right training – this training is essential.

Practising meditation is how we train our mind to be clearer and more focused, which enables us to experience a calmer, more peaceful mind. The ultimate purpose of meditation practice is to train our mind to become more

peaceful and joyful. When we train our mind to be clearer and more focused, we will experience that benefit. Sometimes when we are physically relaxed, we are also able to be mentally calm and relaxed. At other times we may have noticed that even when we have the opportunity to physically relax, our mind is still busy, agitated and disturbed. That is because we don't have the training to relax the mind. However, as we begin to train the mind to focus in meditation, we will begin to notice that as we relax physically, our mind will also begin to settle down, and we will see the benefit of meditation practice.

For example, people have told me that they may have been having a very busy time at work for a long period of time and had been really looking forward to taking a break and having holiday: they were really joyful about this. And for about a week or so, it seemed quite enjoyable for them, just to relax. But after a week or so, they started to feel restless and bored. They didn't know what to do: they were just lying down on a sofa, watching TV. Because there was nothing much to do, their mind started to feel more agitated. Because of this mental agitation, it is possible for you to start having quarrels with your partner or whomever you're living with. So that situation ends up becoming more agitating than relaxing!

We can take the example further, and look at circumstances where people may have retired, and supposedly now have time to relax. However, when the mind is not settled and calm and agitation starts to arise, as mentioned previously, complications may arise with your partner. At that point you might become restless and actually want to go back to work again. It is ironic that earlier, when you were being paid for your work, you didn't feel that enthusiastic about working. You actually wanted a break from work. But now when you have reached the stage where you did not have to work and there was supposedly time to relax, you became so agitated and restless that you actually want to work even without pay! *[Laughter]*. And your partner might even agree that it's best if you worked, because you would be more occupied and have less time for confrontation and arguments.

These consequences occur for individuals who have not trained their minds to be relaxed and calm: even when their external circumstances are relaxed and calm, their minds are still agitated and easily become restless. That is an unfortunate situation. Because of these reasons, I encourage people to start preparing themselves for the time when externally and physically they will have the opportunity to relax, so that their minds can also be relaxed and calm. I encourage this in all age groups of course, but particularly the younger generation. If one starts training now, later on it will be much easier to have the mind settled and calm. The training we engage in now will prepare us for when we reach retirement, when we would have the technique for mental relaxation. Because of our familiarity with it throughout our life, at that time we would be able to really settle and calm the mind so that we could use it in an effective, meaningful way.

---

---

Training the mind basically means familiarising it with being calm and peaceful. Situations such as those described earlier occur because, even though one may physically age, without mental training the afflictions or defilements in the mind do not age. Without mental training, it is not as if the defilements will naturally age and lose their power or strength. They might even become very active at a later stage in life. We need to understand this.

On the other hand, as one matures, if one's meditation techniques such as applying the antidotes for overcoming the delusions also mature, one will be able to use those techniques when one is older. Otherwise, if the specific techniques of using the antidotes to overcome the delusions are not developed as one ages, the defilements will still be strong in one's mind and thus influence the mind to be negative, causing mental unrest and disturbance.

We can see examples of the mental defilements still being strong and active when we see cases of people who, even after reaching the mature age of 85, still get married! *[Much laughter]* Thus we can see that, as far as delusions such as attachment go, such a person has not really matured. The delusions have remained as strong as when the person was young. So as not to be in such a situation yourself, it is good to start the training now. Thus we can relate not only to the temporary benefits of the practice of meditation but also to the long-term benefit for our future. In that way, we can feel encouraged to engage in the practice of meditation.

Regardless of your age now, the actual benefit of the practice of meditation can be experienced in the very process of engaging in meditation. Again, if we relate to the state of mind not familiarised with meditation, it is an agitated one. The agitation arises because of the numerous distractions that completely control our mind. For as long as we are preoccupied with the distractions, our mind is constantly agitated. These mental disturbances are experienced at different levels of practice. To overcome that situation, we need to train our mind not to be influenced by the distractions.

The best way to do that at our present level is to focus on a meditation object. Having chosen an object on which to focus – in this case a neutral object which is our own breath – the actual technique is to not just merely focus on the breath but also to ensure that our mind is distanced from the distractions. For as long as we focus on the breath, we need to make sure that we do not allow our mind to be swayed by the distractions, which come in different forms – thoughts, ideas and so forth. The technique we now adopt is to completely withdraw our mind from all external and internal distractions and keep it 100 per cent on the breath. For the next few minutes we will engage in this practice of focusing on our breath wholeheartedly, with our full attention. *[Pause for meditation]*

As we have attempted now, we can likewise adopt this practice of meditation regularly. We will definitely derive great benefit from that.

#### 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

###### 4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.1.3. The faults of delusions

The topic we are covering from the text is explaining what the delusions are. The first part was identifying and defining the defilements or afflictive emotions. The second point was explaining the sequence in which defilements arise and how they arise. Then we covered what the causes for the defilements to arise in the mind are, which we have gone through.

In accordance with the outline from the Extensive or Great Graduated Path to Enlightenment (or Lam Rim), the third topic in relation to the delusions is explaining what the faults of the delusions are.

According to the explanation in the teaching, as a result of identifying the faults or outcomes of the afflictions, we will then adopt a mindset of regarding the afflictions like an enemy. This specific technique is explained in the context of how we relate to the outside world. In the outside world, we consider someone an enemy when they engage in activities that harm us and don't bring about any benefit for us. When we experience only harm from another, in that instance we label them as an enemy. And an enemy is someone whom we make every effort to avoid.

By seeing the faults of the afflictions, we train the mind to regard the afflictions as a real enemy out to destroy us. The training advises us that by seeing the faults of the afflictions, one then regards them as an enemy. An enemy is that which hinders what we wish for, which is happiness, and that which actually contributes to what we don't wish for, which is suffering. Anyone who contributes to that would be considered a real enemy.

In relation to this topic the faults of the afflictions, the composer of the text himself, Lama Tsongkhapa, gives some explanation of the faults of the afflictions. Then he further quotes from texts such as the *Ornaments of the Mahayana Sutra*, as well as Shantideva's text *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, which give extensive explanations.

To summarise the main points of how to see the faults of the afflictions, we can refer again to the definition of the afflictions that was presented earlier. The definition of an affliction or delusion is that which, from the moment it arises in our mind, disturbs our mental peace. Just from the function of a delusion, we can understand the fault of a delusion because that is—as soon as it arises in the mind, it disturbs our mental peace.

To take a particular instance of how a delusion disturbs the mind as soon as it arises, let's take the particular example of anger. We have all had the experience of when feeling quite restful and calm, for whatever reason,

---

we might suddenly experience a state of anger and agitation in the mind, then in that very instant we will feel disturbed and uncomfortable. That is something we can relate to from our own experience.

The more we think about it in this way, the more we can relate to the faults of the delusions not only with anger but with any other delusion. We can then remind ourselves, 'When this delusion overpowers my mind, I experience unwanted consequences, and disturbances in my mind. It harms myself, and my peace of mind'. The more one thinks about the faults of a delusion, the easier it becomes for us to try to apply the antidotes to overcome that delusion.

On a practical level, one may feel that although one can clearly identify the faults of anger and see it as being harmful to oneself, does that then necessarily prevent anger from arising in one's mind? Of course, at our level, without much training or familiarity in applying the antidotes, it may not be possible to actually prevent anger just by having identified and seen its faults. However, repeatedly recognising its faults will definitely help us to not be completely influenced by anger and to constantly be diligent not fall under its sway or give in to anger and other delusions. This will protect and benefit us in our life, even at our level of practice.

Another primary affliction that is prevalent within us is attachment. Unlike anger, it is harder for us to see the faults of attachment. The reason is that attachment seems to provide us with some sort of benefit along with some sort of pleasure. Because attachment actually presents itself with some sense of enjoyment and pleasure, it seemingly benefits us, also by bringing people together. Thus it becomes hard for us to see the faults of attachment. However, when we scrutinise further and investigate from our experience how attachment harms us in a more subtle way, we slowly begin to realise that attachment is one of the primary sources of unrest in one's life and others' as well.

It also serves as a foundation for many other problems. One fault that we can identify with is that we are never satisfied. With attachment, the more we engage with the object of attachment, the more desire it seems to bring, so we never have a sense of contentment. So a lack of contentment comes about because of attachment or desire.

To relate practically to a very common situation, someone once confided to me that they felt lonely and without companionship in life. I spoke to them quite openly and said, 'Won't you consider perhaps getting married?' [They responded:] 'Actually I had already been married five times!' [*Lots of laughter*] This was a person who came to one of my teachings up in Queensland, at Chenrezig Institute. That situation clearly shows that what caused that person to be in a state of loneliness was not being satisfied with the partners they had had earlier. They tried one partner, weren't satisfied and felt that they might get a better partner the next time. But then they were not satisfied with that. Then they ultimately found themselves to be alone, without any companionship.

Thus we can clearly see the disadvantages of dissatisfaction or discontentment. The teaching advises,

as a way to minimise desire or attachment in one's mind, one should practise contentment. Practising contentment leads to a less desirous mind. Tackling desire or attachment—and practising contentment for that matter—does not mean that we have to get rid of the practical things in our life. Rather it means to appreciate and be content with what we already have. When one develops a sense of contentment, one will really begin to appreciate what one does have; this is very practical advice.

We could go on a bit further in explaining the teaching, but since we don't have that much time left, if there are any questions, we can address them. Otherwise we can continue with the text a bit. However if we don't leave some time for questions, some people might feel: 'I really had a very profound question but I didn't even get an opportunity to ask it', so it's good to give you an opportunity to ask!

*Question:* What are the ways to be satisfied by myself, to remain focused and enthusiastic even if I choose not to engage in relationships with others?

*Answer:* First, it's good for us to know that the feeling of loneliness does not seem to just apply to those who do not have a companion. In other words, the feeling does not come just because of a lack of a partner or lack of friends. I have another instance to relate to you on that point. A woman once confided in me that she felt she was suffering from a sense of loneliness. I asked her if she was living by herself, to which she said that actually she was living with her husband. So, it seems that even when you are with someone, you could feel lonely. This indicates that there must be something missing within oneself.

When others confide in me that they feel lonely, I often half-jokingly say to them: 'Why should you feel a sense of loneliness? You could just go to town and there would be plenty of people there!' But this person answered: 'Geshe-la, you don't really seem to understand what loneliness means. It doesn't mean just having someone around, it's something beyond that'. Of course, I do understand where that feeling comes from.

The point I am making is that loneliness seems to be something beyond just the superficial situation of having a friend or not having a friend. That's not really the main point. There's something more subtle. In relation to people who are living together, such as partners, when loneliness is experienced by someone in a relationship, it seems there is something much more subtle happening, despite their being together with someone. Somehow there seems to be something lacking that causes one to experience the sense of loneliness.

When we further investigate where that lonely feeling comes from, I would think it comes from a feeling of not being completely satisfied with something, a sense of dissatisfaction, feeling that whatever one wishes has not been fulfilled. Even one's partner doesn't seem to be able to fill that empty feeling within oneself. The loneliness seems to be coming from deep within the psyche. From those experiences we can assume, both from a practical level and a Dharma point of view, that the suffering of loneliness does not come from merely from lacking a friend or companion. In fact, the teachings do say that we

---

need friendship and companionship to enrich our life in every way. So when the teachings suggest we have contentment and so forth, we must not misinterpret that to mean living without companionship or friendship.

If we further investigate the cause of the feeling of loneliness arising in the mind, I feel that what is lacking—whether the individual is able to identify it or not—is a true sense of love and compassion in one's heart. When there's a lack of genuine love and compassion within one's own heart, as a consequence one will experience a sense of loneliness. A lack of genuine love and compassion from our own side towards others actually translates into the experience of others neglecting us. The reason why others appear to be neglecting us is that we have not extended a sense of warmth and kindness towards them. When that is lacking from one's own side, naturally it appears that others are neglecting you or abandoning you. Even on a surface level, it seems that others are shying away from you. That is because of that initial lack of love and compassion within one's own heart.

To give a further example of the consequences of a lack of sense of love and compassion in one's heart—in other words, lack of a warm heart—we can even see the consequences for patients in a hospital or a hospice. It is clear that certain patients are withdrawn and always agitated, grumpy and angry. Because of that anger they lack a sense of warm heartedness and kindness towards others. And because they are in that state of mind most of the time, it is very difficult even for the helpers around them to assist them because of their own sense of withdrawal within themselves.

We can clearly see this when we visit places like hospices or homes for the elderly: there are certain elderly people who seem to associate with each other and joke and have a good time with the others there. But then there are some who seem to be completely withdrawn and sitting in a corner by themselves and not really communicating with anyone. The difference is clearly seen in how they interact. The one who has a warm heart, a sense of love and kindness in their heart, is able to communicate and relate to others. They get more friends and companions. Whereas those who are agitated, grumpy and angry are the ones who withdraw and stay in a corner, and thus are lonely.

I've been told that even when you try to help such people, it becomes very difficult because of their state of mind: they are so angry and agitated that when you approach them, they actually pull at you and pinch you. When the attendants or nurses come to help them, the patient sends them away saying: 'Don't come near me. Just go away.' They become physically abusive as well. Thus you can see clearly that this person is lacking a sense of warm heart, and that at a practical level, an agitated, angry mind actually makes one lonely.

To give another illustration, there are some people who live by themselves without a partner, but to overcome that sense of loneliness they live with pets. They have a dog or a cat. Some have confided in me that having a pet helps in removing that sense of loneliness. It is clearly because of the sense of kindness and warmth you show

when you take care of the pets that you get that good response from them as well. Because you get a warm response, having animals as pets would actually help to relieve that sense of loneliness, because there's a mutual giving and sharing of warmth and kindness. So does that actually answer your question? *[Laughter]*

Maybe we should not ignore the question from Tara, because even though she may seem to be the youngest amongst us, in fact she has a very deep sense of understanding, using her mind to try to understand the Dharma. Thus she asks quite good questions on the Dharma. She has a good Dharma mind; that I have observed. Even in passing remarks to others, I comment how, among all the different children who have been brought up here, Tara is one with a real sense of Dharma mind. Having a Dharma mind doesn't need to be approached in an elaborate or profound way, but just by the mere fact that Tara consciously avoids abusing substances such as alcohol or drugs, when normally teenagers at her age want to experience such things is a sufficient indication that her mind is in the Dharma.

So before we conclude for the evening, we sit in an appropriate, relaxed posture. We will again set our mind in a meditation. 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*