
The Condensed Lam Rim

ལྷན་སྐྱེས་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བརྒྱུག་པ་སྟེ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

15 October 2008

As usual it would be good to spend sometime in meditation. For that purpose we adopt a comfortable and relaxed posture. Specific instructions for physical posture during meditation include having the spine straight. When we have our spine straight, it allows the channels within the body to straighten out. When the channels are straightened, they allow the winds to flow freely in the channel. This helps the mind to be fresh and focussed.

Meditation is done in order to strengthen our focus. In order for our meditation to be effective, we need to investigate whether our focus on the object has been appropriate. If the mind becomes unsettled and uneasy we need to question whether our focus on the object has been appropriate or not.

If focussing on an object causes the mind to become unsettled, then we need to distance ourselves from focussing on that particular object. As soon as we reverse our focus on that inappropriate object, then the unsettled mind will subside. This is an important point that we need to relate to.

Whether the object we are focusing on is appropriate or not depends on the consequences of how we feel and what we experience in our mind when we focus on it. If we don't recognise the direct relationship between the focus we put on an inappropriate object and the mind becoming unsettled, then there is nothing much we can do. But if we do notice the consequences, then in order to protect our mind, we must immediately make the effort to reverse attention on that object, and to withdraw our focus from it.

It seems that many people are affected by the attention they give to a certain object or situation. They may experience a momentary feeling of being settled and happy, but then as soon as their attention goes to a particular object or situation, then it can bring up an unsettled feeling within the mind, and the mind feels unhappy again.

As long as we don't recognise that, our mind will be constantly in an unsettled state. In the practice of meditation, we are attempting to really pinpoint and recognise how our mind gives attention to certain objects. Whether the object is a good object or bad object is not as relevant as whether makes the mind unsettled. Even if you consider an object good, if focusing on it results in the mind becoming unsettled, then we must reverse or avert our attention from that object.

The reason why this point is emphasised is because it seems evident that certain individuals are easily irritated. The slightest thing can bring them discomfort and they

become irritated. There is a reason for this. Through investigation and analysis, we come to notice that anyone in that state has difficulty in letting go of something; they are paying undue attention to something in particular, or holding onto certain issues that they are not readily giving up.

As long as we do not deal with that situation by trying to really let go and pay less attention to those issues, then the result will be having a personality that is uptight and always on edge. This affects the people we are living with, our friends or partner. Because if we are easily irritated and always on edge, then it will affect anyone who is around us. This is not beneficial for having a good relationship with others. It also disturbs our own state of mind and affects our surrounding environment.

Always being on edge and easily irritated, results in our close friends and associates slowly abandoning us. In the end, we may be left without any real friendship or companionship. And that would be a pitiful state. For anyone who does question why they feel they are neglected by others or don't have any close friendship or companions, then when they actually investigate and really look into it, they will realise that their situation is a result of being easily irritated, so much so that others can't stand you anymore.

As we live in a society where we need to work and associate with others, it is more practical that we have good relationships and good friends. This depends very much on our own attitude and maintaining a positive outlook on life. Training our mind in generating positive attitudes and trying to combat our negative states of mind is a useful training.

Of course on a practical note, to have moderate companionship may be more suitable than having too many friends, which may be problematic. Some students have confided in me that it is difficult to have many companions and friends as they don't have enough time to see everyone. And then their friends start complaining about the lack of time spent on them. This is an example of having too many companions and friends, which can end up in having arguments and quarrels resulting from not being able to fulfil each other's needs.

If particular situations or attitudes in our mind are harmful and disturbing to us, then we should choose other attitudes and situations that are less harmful and less disturbing. We should choose positive attitudes and positive situations to be in. For example, if we were in a house and there was a fire in one of the exits, it would be considered foolish and stupid if we intentionally ran towards the exit which has the fire, wouldn't it? Why would anyone in their right state of mind run towards an exit that is blazing with fire when there is another door which is free from fire, with no blaze and no danger? It would be considered completely foolish to run towards the door, which has the fire. Similarly, this is the case with our attitudes and situations. When there are positive attitudes and positive situations we can choose from, why we would intentionally put ourselves into difficult situations?

If someone intentionally runs towards an exit that is on fire, people would think they are crazy. Likewise a

person, who does things that are meaningless or senseless would be considered mad or crazy, however if we were to utter everything that is on our mind, then that is exactly what the situation would be. If we actually said whatever is on our mind, then it would appear that we have gone a bit crazy.

The main point is that we need to really pay attention to the positive attitudes that we have. We need to cultivate and encourage ourselves to really look into how to do that. As one of the great Kadampa masters, Geshe Karapa has mentioned, if we do not know the workings of our own mind, then whatever we do will not bring happiness to our mind. If we do not pay attention and investigate what's going on in our mind in order to try to overcome the negative states of mind, then we will constantly be locked into a negative pattern of thinking, which will always lead us to more and more difficulties, and more and more problems. Meditation is the method that helps us deal with the negative and destructive patterns in our mind.

When we engage in the practice of meditation, we can see that it benefits our mind by removing suffering. Relating to the benefits of the practice of meditation we now take the time to spend a few minutes in actual meditation, and the object that we use to focus on is our own breath. In order to get the full benefits of even a few minutes of meditation of focusing on our breath, it is important that we completely withdraw our mind from all distractions and all thoughts. We should commit to focusing just on just our breath. By focusing on the natural inflow and outflow of our breath, we maintain that focus for the next few minutes.

(Pause for meditation)

The topic we are covering is the delusions, also known as afflictions, which are basically disturbing states of mind. Having identified them, the text then goes into explaining the causes for them to arise. We last covered how to apply the antidotes to the delusions in relation to citations from earlier masters. One of the main points explained by the earlier great masters is that we must first of all recognise the delusions in our mind. We must be able to specifically identify them when they arise, recognising that 'OK this delusion has arisen now', or 'that particular delusion has arisen'. By pinpointing the particular delusions when they arise, we are able to apply antidotes to them.

As earlier masters have commented, when a delusion is strong, we need to apply strong antidotes to combat them. When the delusions start to subside and become relaxed then that's the time when we can also relax. If, when the delusions are strong, we begin to relax and don't do anything about it, then that's when we become overwhelmed and completely overpowered by the delusions that cause us to engage in negative deeds. Thus as the great masters have mentioned, it is important to be mindful that when delusions are strong in the mind, that is the time when we need to apply the antidotes.

The great masters also advise to apply the antidotes by recognising delusions as being like an enemy that causes us harm. For example, when a particular delusion arises, such as attachment, if we don't recognise attachment to

begin with or even if we recognise it but we don't consider it as being like an enemy that is harmful to us, then we may not actually do much about it. If we just sit back and further indulge or just let it be, then that attachment, rather than subsiding is most likely going to overpower our mind and influence us, resulting in our mind becoming more and more restless. This restlessness we feel is the disturbance in our mind.

So when restlessness arises in the mind, it is important that we immediately recognise that is because of the attachment that we are feeling from an earlier state of mind. For example, if we are quite calm, relaxed and settled in the morning, but by noon if we start feeling restless, then if we investigate further. It is evident that the mind becomes restless due to attachment arising. We must pinpoint the actual problem. We have to tell ourselves 'this morning I was feeling fine and restful and the reason why I'm now starting to feel restless and my mind is starting to feel agitated is because of the attachment that arises in my mind. If I were to allow the attachment to remain as it is, and allowing myself to be influenced by it, then my mind would just become more and more restless and more and more disturbed, so I need to apply the antidote'. Particular antidotes include contemplating the faults of the object that we feel attachment towards (as explained in detail in our last session).

Similarly, if the delusion of anger arises in the mind, then by recognising the anger, we can apply the antidote of meditating on love. This will help the anger to subside.

In order to understand how the particular antidotes for overcoming attachment and anger work, it is necessary to reflect on the actual nature of attachment and anger itself. Attachment is a mind that exaggerates the positive qualities of an object. When we are attached to a person, we exaggerate their attractiveness. This exaggerated state of mind is the mind of wanting to possess or wanting to come into contact with that object, is the mind of attachment. So in brief, attachment is a mind exaggerating the qualities or attractiveness of an object the it focuses on.

In order to overcome this exaggerated state of mind towards the object, it is effective to think about its natural faults. This brings down the exaggerated view of that object. When the exaggerated view of attractiveness on the object has subsided due to seeing the actual reality, then the natural impurities or faults of the object arise and the attachment is reduced naturally. Likewise anger, which is the opposite of attachment, exaggerates the faults of the object. When the faults of the object are exaggerated, then that develops as an aversion in our mind. We want to harm the object or person because we see no redeeming qualities - everything about the person seems to be negative and bad. This is an exaggerated view. So in order to overcome that exaggerated view or perception, we meditate on love. By focusing on their natural qualities and seeing that person as appealing, the extreme mind of seeing only faults or negativities in the person will subside. By seeing the good qualities and appealing nature of the person, we can start feeling love

towards them. It is important to understand how the antidotes work.

Another effective measure of trying to reduce anger in our mind, in particular being angry with an object, is to distance our mind from the object that we are upset with and actually investigate the emotion of anger itself. 'What is anger? What is this emotion that I am feeling?' By bringing our mind inward and investigating that state of mind, we are feeling more conducive towards the object or the person. The emotion that is being felt and the state of the mind is anger. Try to understand the characteristics of anger, how it arises, what are the results of continuously expressing anger and so forth. The very process of investigation, will help to reduce anger.

To understand the characteristics of anger, sometimes it is useful to intentionally invoke anger by focusing on a person who is irritable. Then we can start analysing and investigating. When anger starts to arise and when we notice how it arises and its characteristics, then it becomes more vivid in our mind. It actually becomes scary to realise how strong and destructive this emotion is.

A mind full of conceptual thoughts is a very busy mind, a mind that is constantly thinking about so many different things, a discursive mind that is always jumping from one thing to the next. This kind of mind is affected by many conceptual thoughts. To overcome such a state of mind, it is said that one of the best remedies is focusing on the breath. By focusing on the breath and keeping the attention there, it helps the mind settle down from all these discursive and conceptual thoughts. We cannot analyse anything while the mind is busy. The first step is to settle the mind. A settled mind is much more conducive to meditation. When the mind is just focusing on the breath and not paying attention to any kinds of thoughts and ideas, the breath helps to settle down the mind.

In relation to the delusion of pride, it is a state of mind of being inflated with the notion that we have superior knowledge. To overcome such a state of mind, we need to contemplate on phenomena or things that we do not fully understand and know yet. To contemplate on those realities will help pride subside from the mind. Examples of things we do not fully understand or fully aware of include the many factors of our own body. When we look and investigate our body, there are many parts and many things that we are not even aware of and that we don't even know the names of. Someone was relating to me that when they were beginning to attempt to study the topic of psychology, one of the things introduced in the beginning was the different functions of the brain. Apparently there are so many different parts of the brain, over a hundred names of different parts of the brain itself that we are not normally even aware of. The very mention of the different aspects and functions of the brain initially overwhelmed him. When we think about those sorts of realities, this will help the mind be free from that pompous, inflated feeling of knowing everything.

As well as the many disadvantages of having the negative state of mind of pride, on a practical level it seems evident that pride obstructs a good, genuine relationship with others. As we all notice, people are a

little wary of others who are seen to be proud. In a gathering, people will say 'Oh, that person is very proud you know' and will not want to relate to that person.

While pride is described as a pompous state of mind, it can be likened to being on top of a mountain and looking down upon others. If we are on top of the mountain, everything else is seemingly under our domain. We are like the pinnacle and everything else is below us. This sort of elated feeling comes about by thinking that we have more knowledge than others, and everyone else is below us. This elated feeling could also be due to the attractive features of our body, thinking that we are more beautiful and everyone is not as beautiful as us. Pride could also be in relation to our perceived intelligence, and so forth.

The harmful state of pride should not be mistaken with self-confidence, a state of mind that is constructive and useful. Many people don't seem to really understand the distinction between self-confidence and pride. Self-confidence is similar to pride, but we must understand that it is not pride. For example, as the great Shantideva in the *Bodhisattva's Way of Life* has explained quite clearly that self-confidence is a state of mind that develops the certainty within ourselves of being able to do something. In a spiritual context it could be something like 'I can overpower the delusions and the negative states of mind within myself. I will not allow the delusions to overpower me, but instead I will exert myself and apply antidotes in order to overpower the delusions'. This attitude of developing a courageous state of mind is what we call self-confidence. We need that self-confidence in our spiritual practice. We need the self-confidence to excel in the positive things we want to accomplish. So it is important that we can discern the difference between pride and self-confidence. We need to cultivate self-confidence while we reduce pride.

In relation to overcoming jealousy, it is advisable that we develop a sense of joy in others' wellbeing and goodness, which is translated as rejoicing. We develop the mind of rejoicing towards an object that we might otherwise feel jealousy towards. When we begin to understand what rejoicing means, we can see how it is a direct opponent to jealousy. Because jealousy is a state of mind that is not happy in the well being of others - we are not happy when they seem to be wealthier than us, we are not happy with people being more beautiful than us, we are not happy with people being smarter than us.

Rather than feeling unhappy about other's successes in work or study, or in relation to physical beauty, features and so forth, if we actually feel happy about that and rejoice that they are doing well in their work, it is good that they have sufficient wealth, and it is good that they have good features and look beautiful. If we feel good about that, then we are rejoicing. Rejoicing as a result of feeling good for others, brings us happiness and joy in our mind. We can definitely see the difference in our experiences with the different attitudes of rejoicing on one hand and jealousy on the other. Two people with different attitudes perceive another person differently. One perceives them with jealousy over their good life and the other rejoices about it. The person that perceives the

other's good life with jealousy is unhappy. It is negatively affecting their mind. The person who is rejoicing over the other's good fortune produces a sense of joy in their own mind. This clearly illustrates that the difference doesn't lie in the person being perceived, because that person is being perceived by two different people. The different experiences in their mind are clearly due to the attitudes that they have developed. The attitude of jealousy results in experiencing a lack of joy in the mind, whereas someone who has a sense of rejoicing has joy and happiness in their mind.

If we know a particular person who is doing well in life and someone else expresses a great joy in that, but we don't feel that kind of joy, then it is actually good to investigate and analyse our own feelings and question ourselves, 'while I don't feel so happy about this other person's well being, why is it that others can feel joyful and happy about that? What is the difference between us?'

If we have been introduced to the concept of jealousy and can identify the characteristics of jealousy, then we can ask the right questions and can come out with the answer immediately, 'oh well that's because of my jealousy'. For someone who does not recognise that it has been their own attitude and negative state of mind of jealousy that is causing our unhappiness, then we might resolve the situation by saying 'well, the best thing is not to be near this person who is well off. If I am in close proximity with them I just feel unhappy'.

Some people have confided in me that they intentionally don't go to Christmas parties because it just brings out lots of uncomfortable feelings. If it is someone who is closely associated with me who can take my advice, I normally advise them that maybe it is a little bit extreme to not go to a Christmas party with your relatives. Rather than avoiding the party maybe you should go with a mind of preparing yourself and trying to feel joyful. If everyone else in the family is doing well, just prepare yourself for your mind to feel happy and joyful for them. If you go with an attitude of rejoicing in your mind, then you might actually enjoy the party yourself.

The antidote to overcome the primary delusion, the root affliction of ignorance, is the meditation of understanding the interdependent nature of phenomena. Contemplating on the lack of inherent existence of phenomena is called the meditation on emptiness. The meditation of selflessness or emptiness of all phenomena is the supreme antidote for overcoming ignorance, which is the root of all afflictions. Once ignorance is removed from our mind, then all other delusions are naturally said to subside. The earlier antidotes that were presented are antidotes for overcoming manifest delusions, such as anger and attachment. However, the earlier antidotes do not serve as an antidote for overcoming the very root of that particular delusion. The specific antidote helps as far as overcoming the observable level of the delusions, but when we overcome ignorance in our mind, it is equivalent to vanquishing or overcoming all delusions.

Before we conclude for the evening, let us spend a few moments in contemplation. As we sit in an appropriate

posture, we keep our attention and focus on the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni' mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed from tape by Kim Foon Looi
Edit 1 by Cynthia Karena
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version
© Tara Institute*