
The Condensed Lam Rim

ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བཞུགས་སྒྲིག་།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

25 March 2009

As usual it will be good to spend some time for meditation. For that purpose, we find an appropriate relaxed sitting position.

Just as we adopt a comfortable position, it is also important to generate a positive motivation. The practice of meditation involves acquainting our mind with positive and good habits.

If we acquaint our mind with positive, good habits, this will benefit us. The more we acquaint ourselves with negative states of mind, the more we harm ourselves. This becomes clear when we look into which kind of mind we need to associate with, and which kind of attitude we need to discard and not become familiar with.

Meditation enables us to cultivate positive attitudes in our mind. When we have acquainted ourselves with these positive attitudes, they become good conditions for us to maintain a happy or positive frame of mind at all times. When we are not acquainted with positive attitudes, even the slightest unfavourable external circumstances can cause our mind to be troubled and affected negatively. When someone acquainted with positive attitudes through regular meditation meets unfavourable external circumstances, those circumstances don't cause their mind to become troubled.

So regardless of external conditions, if we have developed good conditions within ourselves, we can maintain this settled, peaceful state of mind. The technique for developing good internal conditions involves withdrawing our mind from external distractions and maintaining our focus on an internal object. This technique is very important for us.

What are the consequences of not maintaining an internal awareness and not focusing internally? We are already more familiar with focusing on external objects, after having acquainted ourselves with them year after year, to the point that it comes to us naturally. It seems natural to us that we only focus externally, and spend most of our time and energy pursuing external circumstances and objects. Because of that familiarity, we find it very difficult to maintain an internal focus; the mind is constantly disturbed by external objects. At certain times, difficulties will arise, because we are focusing externally and constantly pursuing favourable external conditions that we seem unable to achieve. At other times, we may even gain those external, so-called favourable conditions, but even then, it is questionable whether that really makes us content and happy.

Thus we can clearly see that we have spent much time and energy focusing externally, yet what positive effect have we really gained from that?

If it is a reality for us that we have spent most of our life focusing on external objects, we may come to the point of recognising that we have not really gained anything substantial in terms of real happiness and contentment. When we arrive at that realisation, we can then commit ourselves to spending some time focusing on an internal object.

If we have been spending, say, one hundred percent of our time focusing on external objects and have not found any positive benefit, we can perhaps start spending some of our time – for example, ten percent of our time – focusing inwardly. Then, when we become comfortable using ten percent of our time focusing inwardly, we can gradually increase that to twenty percent, thirty percent, and eventually fifty percent of our time focusing on developing good internal conditions.

Initially, when we begin to recognise that the mind is troubled from pursuing external objects, if we can spend even ten percent of our time focusing inwardly, we will find that it will really bring great relief and great benefit to our mind. So even spending ten percent of our time focusing inwardly can definitely bring positive results.

Of course at this point, there may be some who feel that what the geshe is saying is a bit unreasonable! It may sound unreasonable to claim that focusing externally has brought no benefit or no positive result. One may think that having focused externally, pursuing one's job or work and so forth, one has achieved some beneficial result, such as being able to buy a house, a car, nice furniture, and a certain level of comfort.

When that doubt or question arises in your mind, you should look further into your own situation, and compare the times earlier in your life when you didn't have much in the way of possessions. If you compare your state of mind at that time to your state of mind after you had achieved a certain amount of wealth and business success, you might notice that at the time when you didn't have so much external wealth, your state of mind might have been happier and much more content than after you had become successful. If one notices this is the case, it would be interesting to ask why that could be so.

Why is one's mind still in an unhappy state, even after one has made substantial material gains? First, we should realise that whatever we do is the result of pursuing happiness and wellbeing for ourselves. So the goal we pursue is real happiness for ourselves, and whatever activities we engage in would supposedly be directed towards that end. As mentioned previously, one may have spent much time and energy focusing on gaining a certain amount of external favourable circumstances, yet one has still not achieved a state of real happiness, but is, in fact, more disturbed, anxious and frustrated than one was earlier. At this point, we can recognise the reason: while we have been pursuing the external circumstances for gaining a certain amount of happiness, we have been neglecting the development of the internal conditions for happiness. When we acknowledge that whatever we do is in the interest of our own happiness, it is our

responsibility to try to protect whatever happiness we have.

So, while we are pursuing favourable external conditions for providing a certain level of material happiness, we can also spend time and energy developing the internal conditions that will bring real happiness within us. Even on a mundane or worldly level, these good internal conditions bring happiness, for example, in our relationships within our family. We may have already developed a companionship with another based upon an initial mutual agreement to support and look after each other. In this case, it is important that we protect these favourable conditions that lead to the well-being of not only oneself, but one's partner and one's whole family, if there are children involved. That good favourable condition that was there initially is very important to protect in maintaining the harmony and well-being of the family.

This is a contemporary example of how maintaining favourable internal conditions are really important for the well-being of others.

In fact, such a relationship is not to be taken lightly: the value of good companionship and a good relationship is to be cherished. For those who have already committed to a relationship, those favourable conditions are to be cherished and maintained. When two people agree to be companions and live together, initially the relationship will be based on a mutual good feeling. With those initial good feelings towards each other, they would have made grand plans to live together in a committed relationship.

This is perhaps when marriage takes place, and with the commitment of marriage, there might be also thoughts of having children in the future. Then of course you build up the favourable conditions to have a family, which means each partner may engage in work and try to build up the financial stability to have children. Once one reaches the point of having a certain amount of financial stability and having children, that would be the desired goal of that relationship – of the initial commitment to live together, support each other, have a family, and then live together harmoniously with the family.

Often the situation arises that, when all of this has taken place and the mutual goals have been achieved, something may happen to disrupt the stability of that family and relationship. It could be from either the father's side or the mother's side. What usually occurs is that, even with all of that having been achieved, a part of one partner's mind might think: 'Maybe there is something else more interesting' or 'Perhaps there is a better situation somewhere else'. So that speculation starts to set in, and when it starts to dominate the mind of that partner, a breach in the relationship may occur. Then the family will start to fall apart, and many people will suffer – the other partner and the children – so it is very important that we try to maintain that harmonious family relationship.

Of course I relate this not from my own experience – as a Buddhist monk I wouldn't have that experience – but I have observed others going in and out of relationships, and have had people lamenting their difficulties in relationships to me. So it is from mere observation and

from others relating their experience that I am able to relate this. In my own case, of course, I have many friends and companions. And up until now, I can safely say that I have not had any breach in my relationships. I have maintained my friendships very well; I seem to be able to enjoy my friends and be with them. Until now, that is something that I have always been able to maintain: to cherish my friendships with others. So even based on general friendships, I can say that I have not breached my commitments to others, and thus enjoy to this day the company of all my friends.

However, the situation that I mentioned earlier does occur; I have observed that. And others have related their experience to me, so it is a reality for them.

When difficulty in a relationship starts to occur, it brings a lot of real anxiety and problems for the two partners, because it is not easy to get out of the commitment. If one leaves the relationship, it doesn't involve only the other person: it also involves the welfare of the children as well, if there are children. So one cannot take wanting to separate from the other person lightly.

I have noticed people who have remained in those difficult situations for a long period of time, year after year. If, in the interest of the family, one can resolve that and start thinking about the welfare of the family and try to re-commit oneself and maintain a good relationship and companionship with the other, it would be a much more worthwhile, if it works out, than leaving.

I advise even those from the younger generation that I associate with to pay attention when they engage in a relationship, and don't be hasty. Once you commit to a relationship, try to make it as secure as possible for the long term, for the well being of both partners. There are many in the younger generation who would have experienced difficulties due to their parents' disharmony. I have seen that those children are definitely affected by that.

To elaborate further on the difficult situation of the parents when there is difficulty in a relationship, even in the event of wanting to separate or divorce, there's also other concerns, such as the difficult matter of how you divide your assets. Then after a while, if one of them gets bitter and initiates a court case, the money might be spent on legal fees, rather than getting the financial benefit. We can see that many unwanted and unfavourable situations arise when one is not careful in one's relationship, so it is important that we pay attention to it.

All of this is an elaboration on the example of what happens if there is a lack of goodwill towards others: if there is a lack of positive states of mind, these unfavourable circumstances will occur. On the other hand, the positive attitudes we have developed in our mind will protect us, our relationship, and our family. If we can develop those positive attitudes, based on a loving and kind attitude towards the other, thinking about other's welfare as well, rather than just one's own selfish interest, we can secure the happiness and peace of our own mind, as well as the harmony of one's relationships, family, and so forth.

So in relationships or companionship with others, the main point I want to stress is the importance of a good mental connection with the other. When there is a good mental connection with the other – based on a genuine sense of love and caring for the other, and consideration for the other – if that connection is expressed mutually, that is what will stand the relationship between the two people in good stead. Of course, the physical connection may have to take place as well. In a normal worldly relationship, not having that physical contact might be very difficult. However, what I feel is that while a physical connection may be taking place, if both sides can pay more attention to the mental connection and try to maintain mutual goodwill, that is what will withstand whatever circumstance may occur.

For practical reasons, there might be a time when it is just not favourable for two people in a committed relationship to be together physically. Even if that occurs and a physical separation takes place, because of the initial good mental connection, the goodwill and good feeling for each other will be maintained. Even when there is physical separation, there is still a mutual feeling of concern and caring for each other that can be maintained. Maintained that is what is much more important than the physical closeness.

When there is a good mental connection and there has to be a physical separation, while it may be considered an unfavourable situation, the separation may not be comfortable, but there will be no hard feelings. In fact, we can say that even if there seems to be something lost, on the other hand that mental connection and goodwill is maintained, so there is something gained as well. What is gained is mutual goodwill that may even increase when there is a physical separation.

All of these points are worthwhile considering and paying attention to for those who are definitely in a lifelong relationship.

I may seem to have gone astray from the meditation that we wanted to do! (*laughter*) However the reason why I have emphasised these points here and in earlier sessions is that I really feel strongly about them. This advice is something that really seems to be useful and beneficial in people's lives. I think it is worthwhile taking the time to share something that seems useful and beneficial in people's lives. I can see that in everyday life, sometimes even a small change in attitude may disrupt one's goodwill and relationships. To prevent that, if one can adopt even a slightly more positive attitude and counteract that disruptive thinking, it can save a lot of problems and difficulties later on. What I am attempting to do is to share with you a positive way of looking at things, a positive way of thinking.

Let's take the example of someone who you initially feel close to, such as your partner, friend or relative: someone towards whom you would normally have a good feeling and who has been a good companion. However, later on, a situation may occur where your friend, partner or relative may appear to be very successful, in terms of wealth, status or any success. At that point, whenever we see that person, we may start feeling uncomfortable and unhappy about their success. What is occurring then is a

state of mind called jealousy. When we are in the grip of jealousy, even seeing a good companion will start to make us feel negative and uncomfortable.

When we are possessed by the negative state of mind of jealousy, it can cause a lot of turmoil in our mind, because every time we see that person or relative, we start to feel very uncomfortable. That uncomfortable feeling is nothing more than our perception of that other person, the attitude we have. When it is based on a negative attitude of not being joyful or happy about their situation, one will feel turmoil within oneself.

To counteract that negative feeling, we can train our mind to generate an attitude of rejoicing, which is a feeling of joy and happiness whenever one sees others' success. If a friend or relative or colleague is doing well, one can develop a sense of joy for them. For example, we can say to ourselves: 'It is so good, so great for them that they have success. It is great that things are going well for them.' If one can repeat that internally, really feel it, then instead of jealousy, one can start to feel happy. This shows how, by simply changing our attitude, we can change our whole outlook, which in turns changes our feelings and the experience we have within ourselves. It is one example of how changing a negative attitude to a positive brings us much more joy and inner peace.

If we can prepare our mind to generate a positive attitude of feeling glad and happy about others' success, then when one goes, for example, to family gatherings, reunions, or dinner parties, in the event there are relatives, cousins or distant relatives all gathered together and one has already trained one's mind to feel joyful and happy, one can just rejoice and feel happy about their success and it will not disturb one's mind. And one will have a happy time.

As mentioned previously we will not divert ourselves too much, and spend some time doing meditation. With all the earlier points I have raised, if you find something that is useful or of benefit to you, then by all means keep it in mind and try to use that advice. In the event that some of it did not seem to relate to you, I apologise for having wasted your time for about an hour! (*laughter*)

As mentioned in the beginning of our meditation session, for the practice of meditation, we will again adopt an upright but relaxed sitting position. While we adopt the appropriate physical position, we also pay attention to having a clear state of mind. Initially for the practice of meditation, it is important that we try to induce a mind that is uplifting and joyous, a particularly clear and fresh mind. That is the appropriate condition for engaging in the practise of meditation.

To summarise the two main qualities we need to have to create the appropriate internal condition for meditation, we need to have a clear and bright mind: bright implies a fresh mind. So now we need to induce that clear and bright state of mind. We do this by intentionally committing ourselves to withdrawing our focus and attention away from external and internal distractions. If we don't intentionally withdraw our mind and focus from the distractions, it is the naturally tendency for the mind that for as long as it is distracted, it will lose its clarity and brightness. Thus to maintain clarity and

brightness, we need to have a mind that is free from all adverse, discursive thoughts. The technique that can make that happen is intentionally withdrawing our mind from all distractions, then bringing our focus, one hundred percent, upon the meditation object we have chosen to focus on, which here is the breath. So we focus on the natural inflow and outflow of our breath and try to maintain our focus on that for the next few minutes. *(Pause for meditation)*

You may come out of your meditation now. We are running out of time for our session this evening, but we may have time for a question – maybe a good question? When I refer to a good question, I mean a question that would not give me a hard time to answer *(laughter)*. Actually joking apart, it is something to take into consideration: when we ask a question, we can try to ask an appropriate question, a question that can be managed by the other. If we ask a question that is complicated for the other, it is something we need to take into consideration.

Question: Geshe la, my question relates to the importance of maintaining a good connection with one's partner. In the event of the death of a partner, should one think of the person as having separated from us, or do we think of them as still being around?

Answer: Of course you would be able to relate to what I am about to explain as a Dharma practitioner or spiritual practitioner yourself.

For someone who has the basis of some Dharma practice, the best thing one can do for a late companion who has passed away is to continuously dedicate one's virtues. Whenever one does a good deed, in terms of practice or otherwise, dedicate the virtue of that for the benefit of the other: such as dedicating for them to have a good rebirth, either in the human or divine god realms, or in whatever higher rebirth where they will have all the conducive conditions that enable them to follow spiritual practice, in particular to practise the Dharma. Dedicating our merit to them so that they will be able to continue in their Dharma practice. If one were to dedicate one's virtue whenever one engaged in any practice, to their well-being, that would be a positive contribution from one's own side.

Of course we all have to eventually accept that in any relationship, a physical separation will take place one way or another. Especially when one passes away, however even when that physical separation does take place, the mental connection, the internal goodwill and good feeling can be maintained.

Furthermore as a token of remembering them and contributing to their continued well-being, from the Tibetan Buddhist tradition there is a tradition of celebrating the anniversary of their passing and doing particular practices. In fact, this is not particular to the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, but applies to most other traditions. For example, in the Chinese tradition this month particularly seems to be a month where one's deceased ancestors are remembered. Doing particular prayers and making offerings to the sangha or ordained community and so forth are done in remembrance of their ancestors. So this is something done in the Chinese tradition.

Also, as mentioned previously, in the Tibetan tradition we have a remembrance on the anniversary of the person's passing, making specific offerings and dedicating that to their welfare. That involves making offerings to the Three Jewels, offerings to the sangha, being generous or making generous donations to the poor and so forth and dedicating that merit.

Of course, this is not unique to Buddhism. Even in the Christian tradition, there seem to be those who have similar practices they do to remember their deceased, for example, taking flowers to the grave at a certain time. Some people even celebrate the birthdays of their deceased friend or partner, making a cake and sharing that with others. That seems to be quite a good tradition as well: some virtue or good you do in remembrance of a loved one who is deceased.

Earlier today, an elderly lady whose husband died many years ago, and who is the mother of one of our residents here, baked a cake to celebrate her late husband's birthday and sent me a piece. Thus even in the Christian tradition there seems to be a notion of something remaining when someone is deceased, a belief that a person doesn't suddenly become nothing and disappear completely.

In fact the Christian faith explains that something called the soul or spirit survives death. It is not explained the same way as in the Buddhist tradition, where reincarnation takes place in a particular realm. But they believe the soul either goes to heaven or hell. So definitely there is that belief of something which continues. Within the Buddhist tradition, of course, we believe in the continuity of what we call the self and the mind that is associated with the self.

So in brief, remembering the deceased and doing something virtuous on their behalf and dedicating that merit is worthwhile. But if one were to think about the deceased and it just brought sorrow and sadness in the mind, then that is not very useful, either for the deceased nor for oneself. If feeling sad and sorrowful actually helped the deceased in anyway, by all means it would be something worthwhile to do. But it is not helpful for the deceased and definitely not helpful for oneself. It just makes one feel down and uncomfortable. Rather, engaging in some virtuous deeds would be of benefit to the deceased.

Before we conclude for the evening, we can again spend a few moments in meditation. This time we 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 Kim Foon Looi
Edit 1 by Mary-Lou Considine
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version*

© Tara Institute