
The Condensed Lam Rim

ལྷན་སྐྱེས་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བཞུགས་སྒོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

1 April 2009

It would be good to spend some time in meditation. In order to engage in meditation practice it's good to adopt the appropriate physical posture that is relaxed and upright. Likewise, we need to generate a positive motivation in our mind. The reason we need to pay attention to adopting a positive motivation is that we can all agree that we want to have a positive mind, a good mind, a mind that is imbued with kindness and with love and compassion. That is something that we all would agree upon.

The practice of meditation, which is the practice of Dharma, is a means to generate positive motivations in the mind, and also to secure those positive motivations that we have already generated, and further increase them.

It is important that we pay careful attention to why we would want to develop such positive motivations in our mind. When we look into states of mind such as kindness and love and compassion it is clear that when we have those positive attitudes in our mind they makes us feel more relaxed and happier within ourselves.

The positive feeling of having a joyous and relaxed mind is not only a benefit to oneself. Once one has developed a positive state of mind, such as love and kindness and compassion, it also has a very positive effect upon others surrounding oneself, such as one's partner, husband or wife, children or parents. In that way it also has a positive effect upon whomever one associates with. We can see there is a twofold benefit, for oneself as well as others.

A positive state of mind is also a means to bring your close ones together and live harmoniously. We all strive not just for companionship from close relationships but for the happiness and joy that comes along with that close companionship.

While positive states of mind serve as a means to bring people together, negative states of mind can act as a cause to distance you from others. Thinking along those lines and identifying the positive versus negative states of mind becomes a practical means to adopt a more meaningful life. As we investigate in this way we come to really be able to acknowledge that positive states of mind, mainly kindness, love and compassion, are something that's needed within general society. It is worthwhile to exert oneself to find techniques to promote those positive attitudes within oneself. It is something that we need to look into increasingly.

If we are able to work within ourself to promote those positive states of mind then the more those positive states of mind increase, the more likely it is that we will have a

good, genuine relationship with others. We can also see that our mind becomes more and more joyful as well. In that way we can see the practical benefit of these positive states of mind.

Meditation means to familiarise oneself with a positive state of mind. When we attempt to identify and then increase positive states of mind it is consistent with the practice of meditation in its true sense. When we do a formal meditation it is good to bring to mind the very purpose of meditation.

There are states of mind or attitudes that, as soon as they arise within our self, make us feel uncomfortable and weary. If we don't wish to experience the negative consequences of feeling down, depressed and weary then we have to use every means to overcome the negative states of mind or attitudes that cause this.

We have already covered the topic called afflictive emotions, another translation is delusions, and we have already identified many of these. We can identify these particular states of mind as soon as they arise for what they are and recognise that 'this negative state of mind that is arising within me right now makes me feel uncomfortable'.

We can experience the uncomfortable consequences of negative states of mind immediately. Take anger, for example. It is clear that as soon as anger arises within our mind it makes us feel uncomfortable. We don't feel joy and happiness in our mind when anger arises. It immediately makes us feel uncomfortable. It is similar with jealousy and pride. One immediately experiences unease in one's mind when these negative states of mind arise.

One delusion that is hard to recognise as causing unease in the mind is attachment. When attachment arises it may initially be hard for us to identify and recognise, or even to feel unease in the mind. It is hard to immediately identify the ill effects of attachment. We have to investigate in a roundabout way to actually recognise the ill effects of attachment.

Take, for example, a relationship. If a relationship is based mainly on very strong attachment, then for as long as each partner is able to appease the other, there seemingly is enjoyment in that relationship. If something suddenly occurs and that relationship has to break up then at that time both sides would experience tremendous hurt and sorrow in their minds. At that time the unease in terms of sorrow, pain and hurt will be very evident, very clear. The stronger the relationship was based on attachment the greater the pain that will be experienced when there is a sudden separation. If the relationship was not based entirely on attachment, but more on a real, genuine concern for each other then, in the event that separation takes place, there might, of course, be unease and feeling uncomfortable because of having had their companionship for a long time. But the hurt of separation would not be as great. The pain would not be as strong as in the case where strong attachment was involved. This is the way that we can understand how pain and sorrow will be experienced very strongly due to attachment.

These examples illustrate the main point that is being made here. If one has engaged in the practice of meditation, which encompasses seeing the faults and disadvantages of attachment, then when a separation takes place, due to one's earlier practice of meditation and the familiarity with that practice, one would not experience as much pain and sorrow in the mind.

If one has acquainted one's mind to seeing the disadvantages of attachment and meditated on the ways of overcoming it, when one is separated from an object, one's mind would be able to immediately recognise the faults of being attached to the object. The mind will be able to stay away from that object of attachment, which lessens the obsession with the object. Thus, less sorrow and pain is experienced in the mind.

It is valuable to identify the practice of meditation as a technique to overcome these negative states of mind that bring sorrow and unease to the mind. Again using attachment as an example, as we familiarise ourselves with the practice of meditation it will assist us to not be too obsessed with objects of attachment. Initially our mind may be 100% obsessed with the object and this will bring about many shortcomings in relation to the object. As we acquaint our mind to seeing the disadvantages of attachment, the mind will slowly learn how to distance oneself from the object of attachment or lessen the obsession with the object. In that way it will help the mind to feel at ease.

I can relate an incident of someone who has actually benefited from these techniques of cultivating the positive attitudes. Someone whom I've been closely associated with came to see me once to relate the pain and sorrow of someone having left her in their relationship. In order to help her to overcome her immediate heavy, weighed-down mind I reasoned with her that, 'You may feel that you have lost something but actually rather than losing you have gained something. You have gained your independence. Isn't that something worth considering? What you feel lost is only like garbage.' And the person said, 'Well, that fact about gaining independence is something that I can definitely relate to. That really seems true. But perhaps it is a bit too harsh to refer to the person who left me to being like garbage'. (*laughter*)

As we investigate further, we can see how things affect us depending on our attitude and how we interpret the situation. Again, in relation to an object of attachment, when one is overly obsessed with an object of attachment one feels pain and loss when a separation from that object takes place. When someone seems to be distancing himself or herself from us and we try to pursue them, we start to wear ourselves out. We tend to wear ourselves out by trying to follow and catch up with the other person, who is apparently showing signs of not being really interested in committing themselves to us. If we just focus on that one object, which we seem to be obsessed with, and try to follow it, then that is just going to bring us more and more frustration, pain and hurt. Whereas if we can actually distance ourselves from that object and turn around and look behind us we would notice that there are many smiling faces of our friends.

When I mention that to others they acknowledge that it is very true. It's as if you do not notice that there are other people behind you who are there to help you, smiling. You are obsessed with only one object, but when you turn around you may see that there are others who care for you, who welcome you.

These are some practical ways of changing our attitude into a positive one that will help us to maintain our composure and maintain a more joyous, stable state of mind. Acquainting ourselves with these positive attitudes comes from the practice of meditation. That is what we call meditation. It's training our mind to acquaint ourselves with positive attitudes. These examples are again an attempt to give practical examples of how the practice of meditation can benefit us.

I would like to share more of the advice that I normally share with those that I feel close to, and thus feel concerned about. This is a piece of advice that I give to those who are in a committed relationship as they relate to me their difficulties in the relationship. They sometimes seem to be hasty and too easily come to a decision of wanting separation. When I notice that, I often warn them that the difficulties that seem to be there when they are together in a committed relationship are very insignificant compared to the difficulties that could be faced if an actual separation takes place. That is something that I try to point out to people out of concern.

It is not really for me to meddle in people's lives, but when I feel that there is definitely potential and there is a good way for a relationship to continue, it is really sad to see people come to the drastic decision to separate and experience problems from that. Of course there may be things in long-committed relationships that may cause some unease. That might be because one is too familiar with the other and small things start to become more irritating. They may be quite insignificant when one really thinks about it, but small things may become an aggravation in the relationship. However one must always think about the long term. What could the complications be if separation takes place? There could be many more difficulties, many more problems that would arise.

The main thing is to use our wisdom and intelligence prior to difficult situations arising. If we can use our intelligence to try to prevent certain situations it's good to use that positive way of thinking and looking at things. That's much more worthwhile. I am referring, of course, to situations where there doesn't seem to be a real problem. There are just some small, minor things coming up and then escalating. It is just based on some small things. In those sorts of situations if either partner comes to an immediate conclusion that separation should take place that would be a sad situation.

We mentioned earlier adopting an appropriate posture and generating a positive state of mind. I also mentioned previously that the main point, or the main definition, of meditation is to acquaint our mind with a positive state of mind. What we are practising with meditation is a means to acquaint ourselves with attitudes or states of mind that do not cause unease in the mind, that do not cause the

delusions to arise in the mind. These are the attitudes we are acquainting our minds with.

When we choose an object to meditate upon it is an object that, rather than promoting a negative state of mind and attitude, helps the negative states of mind to subside. In meditation we choose an object that would help that mind not to be diverted towards the distractions. In our practice of meditation right now we use our own breath as the object to focus on. We follow the natural rhythm of breathing in and out, and we try to adopt a mental image of our breath, and focus on that by withdrawing all our attention and focus from any other thoughts or ideas or distractions. We completely withdraw from all other distractions, which includes all thoughts, and try to be just be mindful of the breath itself. We can spend the next few minutes in this way just focusing on the breath.

(Pause for meditation)

That should be sufficient for now. Do you have any questions? You can raise your hands if you have any questions. If there are no questions, I we can go through a bit of the text material. We don't have that much time, a few minutes.

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 strives for liberation

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

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.3. The way in which one approaches death and is conceived (in the subsequent rebirth)

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.3.1. The conditions of death

We have come to the third category in the text. This follows the earlier topics defining the delusions, or afflictive emotions. Then having defined them and explained them in detail, their faults and how they arise and so forth, the next category in the text explains, due to those delusions, the causes for death to occur at the end one's life and how after death how one takes rebirth again. The topic heading is, 'How one dies and is reborn'. This is explained in detailed subdivisions. How one dies is explained with descriptions of the causes of death and so forth. How one is reborn, based on the acceptance of a future life, gives an explanation of the continuum of this life after death and how it meets up with the next life. How does our continuum of this life connect with the next life?

This topic, or category, is subdivided into five main subdivisions. The first is the causes or conditions of death; explaining the causes and conditions of death. The second is the mind at death; explaining the state of mind at the time of death. The third is where the heat gathers in the process of death; how the heat within the body gathers or is withdrawn. The fourth is how one reaches the intermediate state, the state between this life and the next life, after death. The fifth is how one takes rebirth into the next life.

Under the topic of 'causes of death' there are a few different conditions or causes for death. One is death from the exhaustion of one's lifespan. For example, due to one's previous karma, if one is born with a lifespan of 100

years then when the 100 years is up that will be the exhaustion of the lifespan and death will occur because of the exhaustion of the lifespan.

The next is 'death by exhaustion of one's merit'. The example of death because of exhaustion of one's merit is, for example, dying deprived of the necessities of life. That includes dying because there is not sufficient food, sufficient clothing or dwellings and so forth. There are definitely these occurrences.

The necessities, or conditions, for sustenance of life, adequate food shelter and so forth, are said to be the results of one's previous positive karma or what we specifically call here 'merit'. It's because of the results of merit. When one's merit declines and one exhausts one's merit then these conditions of not having sufficient food or clothing and so forth will occur. That then becomes a condition to experience death. Having good resources is said to be the result of positive karma or virtue that we have created in previous lifetimes. Wealth or good resources are said to be a particular result of having engaged in positive deeds of generosity in past lifetimes. With that understanding we can see the importance of being generous, because as we are being generous now that creates the causes to have sufficient means and necessities for ourselves, too.

We can relate to some people who are very wealthy in one year may be completely impoverished and lose everything the next year. What is happening is that their merit to have that wealth is exhausted, and that is why they lose everything.

We could take Saddam Hussein as an example of such an extreme occurrence in someone's life. We all know that he lived lavishly in golden-covered palaces. However, after certain circumstances he had to hide in a hole under the ground with nothing, barely something to eat. When he came out it was very obvious that he was impoverished. Then later he faced death. That is an example of how from such a high status, being powerful and wealthy, everything can turn to nothing at the end.

It is explained that even if one's lifespan may be coming near to exhaustion if one still has merit, or if one actually engages in accumulating merit, then it is possible to lengthen the lifespan and one can live longer. There are techniques provided in the Buddhist teachings of how to engage in certain long-life practices. Besides these meditational practices there are also practical means such as engaging in acts of generosity and so forth. When one engages in good acts and good deeds and they are dedicated towards expanding our life it can help to expand our lifespan and thus one can live longer. It is also mentioned in the teachings that if both one's lifespan as well as merit come to exhaustion it is very difficult to lengthen one's life.

The third condition for death is called 'death from failure to avoid danger'. There are particular circumstances that would be considered dangerous situations that can cause death. For example, if people are not careful eating they can actually choke on their food and that can cause death. That is something that can happen. There are other instances in relation to food. If one is not careful of one's diet one may overeat or if something is totally

disagreeable to oneself, and one is unable to digest it, then it may become a cause for death. These descriptions of causes for death actually give us a practical way to live quite conscientiously in general. It gives us good advice.

It seems that a lot of care is taken to not give children some kind foods, like nuts, that they could choke on. There is a lot of care taken of children. Likewise it is worthwhile as adults to also pay attention to oneself. In our normal diet it is worthwhile that we be wary of taking our food in an appropriate manner.

Furthermore, there are certain foods that if you combine them it can turn into poison. Thus food poisoning can occur, which can be a cause for death. If the foods were eaten separately they would not cause any problem, but because they were mixed it causes some sort of reaction.

In Tibet there used to be some caution in mixing meats with sweets. Somehow that was something that was considered to be a dangerous mixture. However that doesn't seem to be the case here (*laughter*). In particular areas and situations in Tibet there have been cases when meats and sweets were mixed together and some sort of chemical reaction caused food poisoning. There seems to be something to that.

The same can happen with medicines. Certain medicines if taken separately are fine but when you take them together the combination of the two medicines can cause a reaction that will cause poisoning. With food, it's good if we are cautious about how to partake in certain kind of foods. If we know the limits then it seems we can take certain things without them harming us. If we don't know the limits well, or especially if we don't know our limits, that can cause disorders.

The main point of all these explanations in relation to food is that although food is something to nourish us, if it is not taken appropriately it can become a cause of death. We can learn from this advice how to be cautious in taking food and the importance of a healthy diet.

I can give an example of an inappropriate amount of food. Some monks were visiting here to perform some ritual performances. One of the monks apparently got ill one day and was shaking and seemed to be very frightened and crying and said, 'I can actually die from whatever condition I am having.' But when they took him to the doctor, the doctor laughed it off. The diagnosis was that the monk had taken an overdose of some medication that he had. He was on some medication but apparently he took too much at one time. That then caused him to have that reaction.

Also under the subdivision 'death from failure to avoid danger' there is the instance of failing to have the intelligence to know one's capacity to do something. That can cause death. For example, if one does not know how far one can jump, how far would be safe, how far would be dangerous, if one does not have that intelligence or wisdom and one engages in a certain kind of activity, then that activity could be a cause for death.

Another instance of 'death from failure to avoid danger', as explained in the teachings, would be if one were to go into certain areas such as cliffs in the summer when the ground is soft. If one goes too near to the edge the ground

could give way and one could fall to one's death. That would be an instance of not avoiding that danger. Then, if one starts climbing trees in the winter there is the danger in a very cold climate of the branches being frozen and very easily breaking off. If one were to climb tall trees there is the danger of the branches snapping and falling to one's death. These are some of the instances mentioned in the teachings.

These sorts of examples given in the teachings are actually practical advice, because knowing this gives us a practical way to be cautious of certain areas that can be a cause of death.

We can conclude here for the evening. Before we conclude the session, let us spend some time in meditation again, this time focusing on the sound of the mantra of Buddha Shakyamuni.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed from tape by Peter Boothby
Edit 1 by John Burch
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version
© Tara Institute*