
The Condensed Lam Rim

༄༅། །བྱུང་རྒྱུ་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བཞུགས་སོ། །

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

20 May 2009

As usual it would be good to spend some time in meditation. For that purpose, we will sit in a comfortable and relaxed posture to refresh our body. Likewise we need to pay attention to having the right state of mind. The best state of mind we can have is a good positive motivation for doing the meditation practice.

If we adopt a relaxed physical posture but don't pay attention to our state of our mind, we might feel slightly relaxed physically, but meditation will not bring us real solace and inner peace, because the mind is still very agitated. Although the body is relaxed, the mind can be very agitated and concerned with many different thoughts. As long as we follow discursive thoughts, the mind will remain agitated and busy, preventing us from feeling genuinely relaxed.

The optimum circumstances for genuine relaxation occur when we attempt to relax physically and when our mind can also relax, free from the usual disturbing thoughts and busyness and tuned to the point where it is really fresh and clear. Our well-being depends on both our physical and mental well-being. If while we are physically relaxed, the mind can also be in a state where it is clear and fresh, that would really contribute to our overall well-being.

We are all striving to attain a state where we are both physically and mentally relaxed, with a fresh, clear and joyous mind. That is something that we all wish for. While we all long to achieve this, we may notice from our own experience that even if we attempt to relax physically, our mind is not really relaxed. We can't seem to achieve a genuinely calm and peaceful state of mind. If we look at the reasons why the mind is not relaxed and is still agitated, we will notice that because we lack inner focus and allow our mind to be influenced by discursive thoughts, it remains constantly busy with these thoughts and distractions, even though we have attempted to relax physically. The mind is not able to relax within the body because it is constantly diverted or distracted by external distractions.

When the mind is distracted by discursive thoughts, it is being influenced by what we call the delusions. This causes us mental distress and unrest. For as long as our mind is influenced by the delusions, it is constantly in a disturbed, unsettled state and lacks contentment. When we begin to notice this, we realise we must seek a technique to try to settle the mind and not allow it to be influenced by the delusions. The practice of meditation involves focusing the mind on an internal object that does not cause the delusions to arise. Focusing on such an internal object naturally settles the mind. Withdrawing

our mind from the distractions allows the mind to settle within oneself and not to be influenced by the delusions. As a result, the mind starts to feel relaxed and content.

When we begin to notice that the technique of meditation makes the mind genuinely contented and relaxed, we begin to take the practice more seriously and find that we actually cannot do without it: it becomes essential to our well-being. When we are able to adopt the proper technique of meditation – focusing on an object that does not cause the delusions to arise, becoming more familiar with maintaining our focus on that object, and withdrawing our mind from all the delusions – then, as a result of our genuine meditation practice, the delusions in our mind will lessen. We will acquire what we refer to as a subdued mind: a mind not influenced by the delusions.

On the other hand, to the extent we allow our mind to be influenced by the various delusions – which are negative states of mind – the more pain we cause ourselves. We can relate this to specific delusions. Whenever the mind is influenced by anger, we can feel 'pangs' of anger. And whenever our mind is influenced by desire, we feel the pangs and the hurt of desire; likewise with jealousy, pride and so forth. So the more we are influenced by these negative states of mind, known as the delusions, the more unease, pain and hurt we bring ourselves. It is important we recognise that it is the negative states of mind within us that cause our pain, hurt and restlessness. So we must try to make every attempt to overcome their dominance.

To familiarise ourselves with the technique, it is worth our while to actually spend some time in meditation. First we place ourselves in a relaxed physical state, then discipline our mind to focus on the object of attention which, in this case, is the breath. We attune ourselves to focusing on the breath by intentionally withdrawing our mind, for the time being, from all other thoughts and concerns, bringing our full attention and focus to the breath. The manner of focusing on the breath is to mentally observe the breath going in and coming out with its natural rhythm. That means that the breath is not too laboured or too shallow, but has a natural rhythm. Our focus also should be free from the extremes of being too intense or too relaxed. Rather, we should adopt a correct and comfortable level of focus and try to maintain that throughout our meditation session. It is important that we find a comfortable balance within ourselves first and maintain that throughout our meditation.

Initially, we withdraw our mind from all other concerns and thoughts, not allowing it to follow thoughts and distractions, but rather keeping our full attention and focus on the breath. We can make the determination, 'Now my mind is focused on the breath. I am focusing on the natural inflow and outflow of the breath, and I will maintain my focus on that'. After making this resolution, we can try to maintain that attention and focus as best we can for the next few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*)

That should be sufficient for now. Just as we did now, it would be very good if one could regularly spend some time in meditation. As well as setting aside some time every day for regular meditation practice, it would also be worthwhile for us to maintain some awareness throughout the day of the state of our mind, trying to

look within and periodically checking to see what kinds of thoughts are arising. What is influencing those thoughts? Are they positive or negative thoughts – in other words, do the thoughts contribute to one feeling joyful and happy or not? If they are positive thoughts, we can further increase them. But if the thoughts that go through our mind contribute to feelings such as sadness, unhappiness or depression, we would call those unwanted thoughts: thoughts that are not useful to us.

It is important that we try to analyse and check the thoughts that arise in the mind. What is influencing those thoughts? Are they useful for us or not? Following certain thoughts may give us some temporary pleasure. But if we really look into it, does experiencing this temporary pleasure contribute to a long-term benefit to ourselves or not? In certain circumstances, we may derive some fleeting immediate pleasure at first, but indulging in that pleasure may actually become a cause for more unpleasantness, more unhappiness in the long run. If that were so, it may be worthwhile to restrain ourselves a bit. We should try not to give in completely to such fleeting pleasures. Thus it is important that we maintain some self-analysis and awareness throughout the day.

Some people naturally seem have the gift of a clear, fresh mind and joyous mind. For those who have such a naturally joyous mind, it is extremely important to maintain it, and try not to lose that.

Actually we all have the natural capacity to feel joy. But how well we utilise it, how well we support it and cultivate it, is really up to us. As I stress regularly, it is really important that we do not to lose the sense of joy and happiness that we already possess. The benefit of doing a self-analysis is that we can more readily accept the faults we detect within ourselves. We may all have had the experience that, when someone has pointed out our faults, it is hard for us to accept it. We get upset and angry rather than accepting their criticism. Whereas if we look within and analyse ourselves, we may find certain thoughts, attitudes, or actions that are negative, and that we can recognise as a fault. Because we have recognised those faults ourselves, this knowledge is more acceptable to us. We are quite unlikely to be angry at ourselves for detecting these faults because, in our right mind, we would agree that unless and until we overcome those faults, we will always experience their shortcomings and constantly make mistakes. And since we don't want that for ourselves, it is in our own interest that we try to overcome any faults we may detect within ourselves.

As mentioned earlier, when we detect positive states of mind or thoughts that contribute to our happiness and well-being, that is something we can nurture and further increase. In this way, we can really take responsibility for our own well-being, slowly following the process of constantly discerning between good thoughts and bad thoughts, and adopting the positive within ourselves. And in that way, we can definitely make progress.

In fact, the process of self-analysis – analysing our thought patterns and so forth – is a form of meditation, because it is a technique for discerning what is good and what is harmful to us. It is a very worthwhile technique for us to adopt. At the very least it can be quite amusing

to watch our own mind! We would find all sorts of things going on. It can be quite a spectacle just to observe our mind and what it comes up with. Sometimes we might just laugh at ourselves, sometimes we may get a little bit frustrated, but nevertheless, as we become more familiar with the workings of our mind, we begin to be able to shape it and direct it in a positive way.

With the remaining few minutes that we have for our session, I give you the option of asking some questions if you have any.

Question: Is Geshe-la able to give us an example of the technique of an analytical meditation or meditation he just mentioned? *(Student, further clarifying):* I understand that the meditation on the breath is to help to still the mind. He also mentioned that self-analysis can help us in understanding ourselves much better. Is there an example of that type of meditation? *(Translator, further clarifying):* Besides looking at the mind as Geshe-la suggested? *(Student, further clarifying):* Do you recount activities throughout the day? How do you judge the difference between discursive thoughts, the negative thoughts and the positive thoughts? How do you discern that?

Answer: To give the example of the simple technique of analytical meditation where one observe one's own mind, discerning the positive from the negative would be to identify anger, for instance, as being a negative state of mind and the opposite of that would be compassion. In your own experience, how do you react when you feel anger towards someone? Does that feel comfortable for you? Do you have a stressful state of mind at that time? And when you feel compassion towards someone, how does that feel as an experience? Does that feel joyful and contribute to your well-being?

Basically, by analysing the advantages and the disadvantages, of particular states of mind such as anger, we can discern between positive thoughts and negative thoughts by identifying how we actually feel. We notice that when we feel compassion for someone, it feels joyful and good, even for ourselves. We can thus remind ourselves that we must try to cultivate more compassion. If we detect that anger feels uncomfortable, we can determine to try to overcome it, try to reduce anger within ourselves. That is basically the process of how we discern between positive and negative states of mind.

Now the question that may arise is, how can this analytical process become a meditation, if meditation means keeping your mind focused on something? For analysis to be a form of meditation, one must be sure to keep one's mind focused on the particular object of analysis and not be influenced by other thoughts or distractions. So we keep the mind focused on the main point one is analysing. If one is able to maintain that focus on the point one is analysing, whatever it is, then that becomes meditation. The point here is to be able to focus on whatever one is analysing at that moment, at that time. One needs to understand that analytical meditation is a specific technique of focusing the mind on the particular object of analysis, and this is why it becomes an aid to further develop our single-pointed contemplative meditation.

The particular advice in the teachings is that, for beginners, the combination of contemplative meditation and analytical meditation go hand in hand. This is a really skilful way to develop one's meditation practice, as analytical meditation can further enhance single-pointed meditation. The main point Geshe-la is making is that analytical meditation helps contemplative meditation. So the process of analysing an object actually enhances the ability to focus single-pointedly when one chooses to do so.

Question: Could Geshe-la explain, when I am meditating, I feel completely relaxed but I also get rapid eye movements. I just wonder if there is any method to stop that from happening. Is there some kind of...muscle exercise, or yoga form that one can do to stop that...specifically to stop the eye from being active?

Answer: It could be due to different causes. Of course, if there is nothing wrong with the eye, that is something to be glad about! Some people may have what you call a 'tick' or something, but if it is not that, there could be other causes, like how the nerves function in the body, what we call the wind element. Different causes could cause that, so it is really hard to know what the cause could be here.

As mentioned in the texts, there are occurrences where someone may perceive something like hair falling, but in fact that is just an illusion, it is not really occurring. That can occur at certain times. I have heard others mention they do have that experience of where they saw an image of where the hair seems to be falling. Sometimes there can be defects within the eye organ that cause the eye to see images like that.

Although it is hard for me to specify what could be causing your eye movement, perhaps you should not be too concerned, because the object of meditation, as mentioned many times previously, is the mental image. One should remind oneself constantly about focusing on the mental image; that should become the main concern for you in meditation. If you start paying attention to the rapid eye movement, that itself becomes a distraction. Whereas if you don't allow it to divert your mind from the mental image and try to maintain your focus on the object of meditation itself, it will not become a hindrance or obstacle to your meditation.

As described in the teachings, a meditator reaches a point where they can maintain their focus quite well on an internal object – even if their eyes are slightly open and there is some movement in front of them, it would not disturb their focus. That is an indication that the focus is an internal one. So if external physical movements cannot disturb a meditator when they are focused on an internal object, then eye movement should not in any way become a cause for disturbing one's meditation. If you can remind yourself of that, then it should not be a real obstacle.

Question: There seems to be different approaches in how to deal with suffering in the teachings. In the text *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* suffering is presented as something that one needs to overcome, and thus one strives for liberation. But in the *Guru Puja* there is a verse that indicates developing the wish to willingly take upon the sufferings of all sentient beings. So, they seem to be

contradictory, one wishing to be free from sufferings and the other wanting to have suffering?

Answer: Of course, those two different states of mind are trained on different levels.

First, not wishing to experience any suffering and thus striving for liberation is of course in relation to the Small Scope. Then the Medium Scope aims more for self-liberation: one is striving for liberation, to be free from suffering oneself. In relation to the verse in the *Guru Puja*, that of course is a specific Mahayana training within the Great Scope, where one wishes to free all beings from suffering.

What is important here is that the technique or practice of 'taking the sufferings of other sentient beings upon oneself' must be understood in its proper context: the practice of giving one's happiness to others and taking their suffering, in Tibetan – the 'tong-len' practice, is a means to destroy the cause of one's own sufferings as well. In the visualisation, as one takes in the sufferings of other sentient beings, this destroys the self-cherishing mind within oneself. Thus the practice actually becomes a cause for destroying the cause of our own suffering.

In terms of the scope, we can definitely see that the earlier attitudes were primarily motivated by a self-concern; there is still a little bit of self-cherishing there. Whereas the latter state of mind or attitude is where one actually wishes, not only for oneself, but for all other sentient beings to be free from suffering as well. In taking the sufferings of other sentient beings upon oneself, one imagines not only that the suffering of all other sentient beings is eliminated, but that this also becomes a cause to destroy one's own sufferings.

The benefit of that attitude can be far superior to just focusing on one's own suffering. As opposed to the Medium Scope, the Great Scope practitioner has a completely different view when it comes to removing suffering. It is not in relation just to one's own suffering any more, but rather the main interest is other beings' suffering. The practitioner in the Medium Scope is mainly concerned with overcoming their own suffering and striving for their own liberation. Whereas when the practitioner advances to the Great Scope, they see that focusing only on one's own liberation from suffering is improper. To strive for only one's own liberation would be self-centred when all other beings, who have been as kind as one's mother, are suffering. Thus exchanging one's self-cherishing mind for the mind that cherishes all other sentient beings and wishing all other beings to be free from suffering is the extent of the aspirations and goals of a Great Scope practitioner.

Another important point that was mentioned earlier is that when one takes in the suffering of other sentient beings, it is important that we do the proper visualisation of that suffering as the means to destroy the self-cherishing mind. If one imagines that the suffering comes in and actually remains within oneself, that can cause more angst, more unease, within oneself if there's something left. Rather one must visualise that one's own self-cherishing – the cause of one's suffering – and the suffering itself is completely destroyed within oneself as well. Thus there is a mutual benefit: one takes upon

oneself the suffering of other sentient beings, and destroys the cause of one's suffering, as well as the result of suffering itself.

Student clarifying: Are you saying the Great Scope practitioner should have abandoned renunciation or have they transcended it?

Answer: Bodhichitta itself is an advanced form of renunciation. The renunciation developed in the Medium Scope – that is the hearer or solitary realiser practitioners – is the renunciation of overcoming the cause of cyclic existence or samsara: the cause is mainly what we call the delusions. So overcoming the delusions becomes a means of overcoming samsara.

Whereas to become omniscient, to become enlightened or to become a buddha, one has to not only overcome the delusions, but also the subtle imprints of the delusions. Thus as a bodhisattva, one wishes not only to overcome the delusions themselves, but the very root, the very imprint of those delusions. Thus is the superior form of renunciation.

Question: I am just curious. Everyone seems to have different ideas of what enlightenment actually is. So what does aspiring to achieve enlightenment mean? Do practitioners actually have any concept or understanding of what they are aspiring to?

Answer: It seems that there can be two types of practitioner: those who completely understand what enlightenment is and thus strive towards it; and those who are not so clear about what enlightenment is, but who still strive to achieve it. The difference lies in their faculties.

Those with an intelligent faculty will make every attempt to understand what enlightenment is as they strive to achieve it. So they think: 'How can I possibly overcome ignorance? Can ignorance be completely removed or not?' By analysing what ignorance is and how it can be removed, they come to the point of realising that ignorance can be completely eradicated from their mind through the wisdom realising selflessness or emptiness. When they realize that, then they understand enlightenment and the possibility of achieving it. Thus when, through their sound logical reasons, they have exhausted all the reasons, and covered every possible angle to determine that enlightenment is possible they put their full potential and energy into starting to achieving enlightenment.

Then there is the situation of those of dull faculty. Here dull should not be understood to mean stupid and completely ignorant; rather the term is used to contrast the previous type of practitioner who follows an analytical, reasoning process. Someone with a dull faculty receives the explanation and may not yet be able to understand the full extent of that explanation – such as the explanation that enlightenment is possible when one removes ignorance, and the process of how to remove ignorance. But based on that explanation and having received those instructions, without too much investigation, they base their practice on their faith that it is possible; just as the Buddha has taught, without questioning it much, they just do the practice.

Question: When you refer to removing ignorance, does that mean that the omniscient mind totally knows everything? Can the Buddha literally know and understand everything?

Answer: The omniscient mind refers to knowing everything as it is, the causes and consequences: exactly how everything is.

For example, we can perceive the flower using our eye. But as an ordinary being, we won't have the omniscient mind's perception of the flower, for example. An omniscient mind's perception of a flower differs from an ordinary mind's perception of a flower. A person with an ordinary mind just sees the flower, that's it; it doesn't go much beyond that. Whereas when an omniscient mind perceives the flower, at the same instance of perceiving the flower, it will be able to completely understand the impermanence and emptiness of the flower; it sees and knows each and every atom that makes up the flower, sees the specific causes of the flower, such as who planted the flower, which garden it came from, who actually brought it here. All of those finer details are seen simultaneously: that is the capacity an omniscient mind has in relation to just one flower.

We will conclude here for the evening. Before we finish the session, we can spend a few moments in contemplation, this time focusing on the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNIYE SOHA

*Transcribed from tape by Kim Foon Looi
Edit 1 by John Burch and Mary-Lou Considine
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version
© Tara Institute*