
The Condensed Lam Rim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

10 June 2009

As usual we will spend some time in meditation. Today we can actually spend a good amount of time in meditation so we can have a good meditation. As regularly explained, to meditate we sit in an appropriate relaxed and upright position.

When we consider the needs and purposes of the practice of meditation, they can be subsumed into a number of reasons. First of all, the purpose is to gain a relaxed state of mind that is free of all the discursive thoughts that we constantly are occupied with. Secondly, it is to protect the mind from adverse circumstances such as depression and unhappy states of mind.

Meditation protects the joy and happy states of mind within oneself. This can be three-fold. If one already has a sense of joy and happiness in one's mind, meditation is a technique to protect whatever happiness and joy that we have. If one already has a continuous state of happiness and joy, meditation allows us to further increase that sense of joy and happiness within one's mind. If one lacks a sense of joy and happiness, meditation is a technique of trying to generate some sense of joy and happiness in the mind. Meditation is relevant at all three levels.

When we consider gaining a relaxed state of mind we must not misinterpret that as just a blank state of mind, a spaced-out mind. A relaxed state of mind specifically refers to a mind that is not oppressed by disturbing states of mind. A relaxed state of mind is free from disturbing states of mind such as discursive thoughts and so forth. That is how we should understand what gaining a relaxed state of mind with the technique of meditation means. One can gain a normal spaced-out and relaxed state of mind just lying back on the couch. (*laughter*)

If a relaxed state of mind were just a spaced-out state of mind then even taking a good nap can bring about a relaxed state of mind. But we don't consider sleeping as meditation, do we? There is a difference here.

One can, however, transform one's ordinary sleep into a meditative state. This can be done when one has developed a sense of love and compassion in one's heart and reached the bodhichitta state of mind, the altruistic wish to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all beings. When that has been developed within one's mind then even sleeping would be an act of having a sense of love and compassion for others. In that sense, it can turn into a practice.

In relation to that level of practice, prior to going to sleep in the evening one can develop some love and compassion in one's heart and develop a kind state of mind. Then, if we were to fall asleep in that state of mind it would be a virtuous sleep.

When one generates a virtuous state of mind prior to going to sleep, as well as the positive effects of spending one's sleep in a virtuous state of mind it will, on a practical level,

help one to sleep better. When one goes to sleep happy, with a mind that is imbued with love, compassion and kindness, those attitudes bring a soothing effect to one's mind. Thus one's sleep will be a sound, good sleep. If our mind is troubled with worries and negativity, it will affect one's sleep so that one does not sleep well. Even if one were to fall asleep, because the mind is in an agitated state one might have disturbing dreams and so forth. This is all in relation to the state of mind during our sleep. On a practical level we can see that the practice of meditation can be useful.

If one has spent some time focusing on a particular object by withdrawing the mind from all disturbing thoughts then, through that familiarity, if one notices that one is a little bit agitated at the time of going to bed (which will affect one's sleep), then one can use the same meditation techniques of withdrawing the mind from all discursive thoughts. If one withdraws one's mind from all disturbing thoughts the mind will naturally subside into a calm state. If we go to bed in that state our sleep will be sound.

Familiarisation with the practice of withdrawing our mind from all discursive and disturbing states of mind and bringing it within a formal practice of meditation is useful in many different situations in one's life. One needs to be able to apply that technique in various uncomfortable situations. If one were to be in a situation that causes one to start getting agitated and angry one can remind oneself that if one allows one's mind to be influenced by anger it will create an uncomfortable, disturbed state of mind. In this situation we can immediately try to withdraw from the state of anger and focused the mind inward, drawing it within. That practice will help one not to be influenced by the state of anger. We can apply the technique in this way in various uncomfortable situations.

Familiarity with the technique of meditation becomes a very sound support in one's life to protect one from adverse circumstances. Familiarity with the practice of withdrawing the mind and bringing it inward in situations where one finds that negative states of mind are starting to manifest, becomes a means for us to use our discriminative awareness to check throughout the day what state of mind one is in. It assists that awareness of oneself and being able to use discriminative wisdom to see whether our mind is being influenced by negativity or not. We can see how we react to certain situations. In that way it becomes a means to protect oneself.

A lack of discriminative awareness, or analytical wisdom, would mean that we would fall prey to any state of mind that occurs within oneself in whatever situation that we find ourselves. If the situation seems good we immediately feel a little bit excited and joyful. If the circumstances change and one sees it as an unwanted or negative situation our mind will immediately respond by becoming unhappy and agitated.

This is because we allow ourselves to give in to our feelings without analysing the situation. We naturally seem to give in to whatever interpretation we are accustomed to in our daily life. We interpret situations as good or bad without analysing the situation. Generating and maintaining a sense of analytical wisdom within oneself means that one will not immediately come to conclusions in relation to the immediate situation. Instead one will be able to hold back and investigate and analyse before coming to any conclusions and deeming it as either good or bad. It will help to stop being influenced by either a strong sense of

attachment or anger in one's mind. Thus analytical wisdom is a useful tool to develop and further enhance within us.

Furthermore, the benefits of having a relaxed state of mind mean that whatever activity one may engage in, a virtuous or Dharma activity or even a mundane activity, is more likely to be accomplished in a desirable way. We will be able to complete whatever one sets out to do in a more meaningful way. If, however, one allows one's mind to be disturbed by negative states of mind then, because the mind is in turmoil and disturbed, it affects being able to make good and clear decisions. Even if it is a spiritual practice, a Dharma practice, one will not be able to obtain sound, good results. This is even more so with worldly activities. We would find that, even in our worldly activities, whatever we set out to do will not be accomplished well. Allowing our mind to be influenced by negativity and disturbed will lead to more complications in life.

We will now spend a few minutes in meditation. One intentionally withdraws one's mind from all external distractions, all discursive thoughts, and brings the mind's focus within. Rather than, as usual, allowing the mind to wander off in every direction and following every whim of our thoughts, we withdraw and bring the mind inward. In attempting to do this we might find the mind becomes a little relaxed. But if we don't have something to focus on it will be very easy for the mind to get distracted again, because there is nothing to anchor the settled mind that is focused inward. If there is no anchor it can very easily become distracted. Once it gets distracted it might be very difficult to bring the focus back within again. Thus, in every technique of meditation it is advised to choose an object to focus on as a way to anchor the mind. As explained in the teachings, focusing on the breath is one of the most appropriate objects for a beginner. Thus we use the breath to set our focus upon.

First of all we withdraw our mind from the distractions and bring it inward. Then we pay attention to the breath by focusing on the mental image of the breath. As we breathe in and breathe out, we hold our attention upon our breath. We make an attempt to place 100% of our focus on the breath itself.

It is important that we discipline ourselves from the very beginning to gain some benefit from this practice. The best way to discipline ourselves would be to make a promise to ourselves that, 'For the next few minutes I will not allow my mind to wander off. As soon as I notice that it has wandered off I will immediately bring the mind's focus inward again'. We commit ourselves for the next few minutes to just focusing on one's breath and not allowing it to wander off. In this way we will spend the next few minutes in meditation. (*Pause for meditation.*)

Even in our short attempt to meditate and focus on our breath we may have noticed that the mind has naturally settled down. We may have experienced an immediate sense of relaxation and joy in our mind. That comes about naturally by withdrawing the mind from all the distractions. This is experienced when we have, to the best of our ability, made a proper attempt to focus and place single-pointed attention on the object of the meditation, which in this case was the breath.

However, as beginners we would find that while making every attempt to focus on the breath the mind will still get distracted by external occurrences, such as pleasant or unpleasant sounds, sights etc. Thoughts also may occur in

the mind. These occurrences are due to our familiarity with those objects. It is natural that they will occur. In the practice of meditation what we attempt to do is not to hang onto those distractions and analyse and investigate them. Instead, whatever the distraction may be, we just leave it aside and refocus on the object. In this way we will be able to maintain more familiarity with just focusing on the chosen object of meditation. That is what we need to do.

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)

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.3.2. The mind of death

We will now go on with the material from the text, as we have not been able to do so in the last few sessions. The topic that we are covering from the text at this time is 'death and how one takes rebirth after death'. We have covered the first part of this topic, which is identifying the particular causes of death. Having covered that, in our last sessions we went into the different states of mind at the time of death.

Recapping the different states of mind for those of you who were not here, there are three types of mind that will occur at the time of death. The mind of death can be either a virtuous state of mind, a non-virtuous state of mind or an ethically neutral state mind.

The reason that this is explained is because the state of mind at the time of death will determine our future rebirth. According to the Buddha's teachings, when one dies one does not cease to exist. Instead there is a continuum that goes on to the next life. That is what rebirth is. The type of rebirth is determined by the state of mind one has at the time of death.

The death state of mind is also divided into coarser and subtler levels. It is explained that during the coarse death state of mind one activates the 'seeds' or imprints left in the mind by our previous actions. The coarse death state of mind is defined as the state of mind that occurs just prior to the external wind ceasing (when breathing stops). That is the coarse death state of mind. The subtle death state of mind is where the external air or wind has ceased but the internal wind has not yet ceased. Even though the external wind, which is the breath, might have stopped there is an internal wind or air element within the body that maintains the consciousness within oneself. This is referred to as the subtle death state of mind.

Apparently there was a recent occurrence where someone's breath had stopped but they revived and came back to life after 40 minutes. There are many occurrences like that. If the breath had stopped for 40 minutes it is an indication, from a conventional point of view, that the person is dead. Death is pronounced when the breath has stopped. However, that is only the stopping of the external wind or air element. There is still an internal wind element. In the recent occurrence someone still came back to life because, in theory, they have not actually died.

Apparently this lady was shown on TV. She was named Death Lucky or Defying Death. She was shown to come back and be very normal. She was jumping up and down and

doing all the normal activities again. What was explained was that she had died for 40 minutes but then came back to life again. These sorts of incidents occur. According to the explanations in the Buddha's teachings this is because there is still an internal wind that has not ceased.

Coming back to the main point of the dividing line between the coarse mind of death and the subtle mind of death; the coarse mind of death is where the external wind has not ceased but is just about to cease and the internal wind is about to take over. At that time, just prior to the external breath ceasing, it is said that when the coarse state of mind of death occurs the imprints in one's mind are activated. If one is in a virtuous state of mind at that time it is said that virtuous, positive imprints within one's mind will be activated. That becomes the cause for a good rebirth in the future life. If there is a negative mind when the coarse mind of death is apparent that will prompt the negative imprints in the mind to be activated and become the cause for rebirth in an unfortunate state. Thus this is deemed to be a very crucial time where one, through every measure, tries to have a good, positive state of mind. When the coarse mind of death transforms into the subtle mind of death it is said that the death mind will naturally become an ethically neutral state of mind. In that state it is beyond being either virtuous or negative. It naturally goes into a neutral state.

It is because of these occurrences that someone can come back to life even when the breath has stopped. Sometimes this happens through medical complications, or physically in old age it seems there might be times when the breath might stop for a while but they are actually not dead. In Tibet, rather than concluding that someone has died and preparing the funeral there is a tradition of keeping available some medications, herbal and so forth, that may help to revive the person. In case they have not died it is possible that, even if the breath has stopped for a while, they can be revived.

There are many instances where the breath has stopped and they have been pronounced dead and been taken to the cremation ground, but on the next day when they were about to be cremated they actually stood up as they were not actually dead. There were similar occurrences in Nepal. In Nepal there is a taboo about someone coming back from the dead to be a zombie, which was considered to be evil. Once when someone naturally revived from death a mob actually killed the person thinking it was a zombie! (*laugther*) These things do occur.

Apparently there was the belief in zombies in Nepal in ancient times. To this day many of the old houses in Nepal have very low, small doorways. It is believed that zombies walked straight and can't bend over and so they wouldn't be able to enter small doorways. Thus, to protect themselves from zombies they had small doors.

Also in Nepal, there is a clan or tribe that considers someone dying in the home inauspicious. According to their beliefs if someone were to die at home it would be considered very unfortunate. The main thing was that a dead person shouldn't be taken out through the door, as that was very inauspicious. So, if someone were to die in the house they would have to take the body out through the window. In order to prevent any inauspiciousness this group would, when there were signs of death occurring, take a person to live near the cremation place. Then they would wait for them to die near the cremation place. It was on one of these occasions that someone was pronounced dead and then they were being prepared to be placed on a cremation pyre, they

stood up. The others thought it was a zombie and killed that person.

To recap the main point made earlier. According to the explanation in the text a positive or negative imprint in the mind is activated during the coarse mind of death, which is just before the external breath ceases. Because of this, in Buddhist countries and particularly in Tibet, the period just before the breath stops is considered to be a very crucial time and a very important time for the dying person to be in a comfortable and relaxed state of mind. Relatives or whoever will help the dying person to be in a virtuous state of mind by reminding them of virtuous objects and positive states of mind such as love and compassion. This will prompt the dying person to be in a virtuous frame of mind just prior to death. Because the person is still conscious they are still able to generate positive states of mind. When their breath stops in that virtuous state of mind, it will then allow a positive imprint in the mind to be activated.

The text explains that a person in the death process can be reminded either by others or by their own familiarity in the past with virtue to be in virtuous state of mind. A virtuous mind will activate a virtuous imprint in the mind. Conversely one can be reminded of negative states of mind by others or through one's own familiarity with non-virtue in the past. A non-virtuous state of mind will activate a non-virtuous imprint in the mind.

Our practice of meditation is a means to prepare ourselves for the death process. If we can engage in a daily practice generating a virtuous state of mind then, through that familiarity, one will naturally be able to be in a virtuous state of mind in the death process. Thus the practice we do now can also be seen as a preparation for our death.

As an ordinary person, it is the specific states of mind called attachment and grasping that activate the imprints in the mind when going through the death process. When it becomes apparent to an ordinary person that they are about to die, initially there will be a natural attachment to their present existence. Because of grasping at the self there will be grasping at this life. There will be also be a sense of attachment to the present body. It will be difficult to let go of that attachment. However when it becomes apparent that one is going to die, that attachment turns into grasping at a future existence, a future life. In this way attachment and grasping become the immediate cause for that dying person to leave their present body and enter the 'intermediate existence'. In Tibetan the word is *bardo*.

Intermediate existence is a state between this life and the future life. A period of existence when this life has ceased but the next rebirth has yet to be formed. That state of existence is called the intermediate state. Attachment and grasping are the causes to attain that intermediate state. As mentioned previously in the teachings, when the delusions were explained, attachment is the main cause of cyclic existence. Amongst the delusions, attachment is the main cause that projects us into cyclic existence. If one doesn't have attachment then the karmic imprints in themselves cannot serve as a cause to take rebirth in cyclic existence.

At this stage it becomes clearer that this is the process. Attachment serves as the main cause for immediate future existence in the intermediate state and then, beyond that, the next rebirth. As an ordinary person we have the five contaminated aggregates. Attachment to the five contaminated aggregates becomes the cause for coming back

into cyclic existence with similar contaminated aggregates. It should be understood in that way.

The text goes into further explaining how a being in that intermediate state takes rebirth, how the intermediate state being is formed and the characteristics of the intermediate state being. We can leave that for our next session. It is good that we just try to understand these main points and try to work with that and go further slowly.

The main point that is being made is that the explanations of what happens after entering the intermediate state should be understood slowly as we gain more understanding of the full context of the Buddha's teachings. Otherwise, for someone who is hearing this for the first time right now, a beginner, it may sound like a mental fabrication conjured up by the mind, a figment of the imagination. We won't blame people for thinking in that way as it may seem that this is not touching reality. That is because all of this information may be very new and they may not have a particular insight into it. Nevertheless, if one goes through these explanations slowly, it can become clearer.

Whether we fully grasp this and understand it or not, the fact remains there are many individuals who remember past lives.

There are many instances of people, particularly children, remembering their past lives. There are occurrences in India in recent times and also in some parts in Europe. Even His Holiness the Dalai Lama had heard about an incident in Turkey, I think, and was interested in that. A girl kept mentioning that she had previous parents that she could remember. She could even name them. Her father said he thought that she was just talking nonsense as he didn't believe in past and future lives himself. However, when his own daughter was very insistent, even naming the places like the school she went to and the area that she lived, he went to look for that area and it was exactly as his daughter described it. They looked around and found the people that she claimed were her parents in her past life. They were identified and recognised. The school was clearly identified. After this the father said that he started to really believe in past lives. When relating this story His Holiness the Dalai Lama said the girl turned out to have four parents; the father and mother of this life, but having identified the father and mother of her past life she also was very close to them as well.

This girl apparently started to mention these things quite a lot from very early on. After a certain point it became something that the parents had to take into consideration. When that research was done it was all found to be true. This sort of occurrence validates that something is remembered.

It seems that when someone is very young there are times where we remember past lives. We actually do have memories of past lives. But later on we forget about it.

There is a boy who grew up here at Tara Institute, called Chonyi. Apparently he has some sort of memory of being a tiger in a past life. He had a natural inclination to climb even when he was very young. He seemed to have an image in his mind of being a tiger or something like that. Thus, he had a natural instinct to claw and climb trees.

Another boy called Tenzin, a half Tibetan boy, used to talk about the distance of stars and the like when he was very young. When his parents were asked, 'Who taught him that? Why is he talking about this?' they said, 'He comes up with

this himself. No one actually told him about it. But he seems to know about all these things.'

And then there are children who seem to have some sort of language they use which no one else understands. Somehow they have some sort of language for themselves.

There are many instances of stories of remembering past lives in Tibet. However that might not be relevant here. It is better to use examples that occur in the modern world.

I have a personal experience myself in first meeting the reincarnation of my own teacher, Geshe Ngawang Dhargye. When I went to see him for the first time after he was recognised, when he was a very young boy, he immediately seemed to be very fond of me. That really seemed to show an indication that he recognised me. Even as a young child he would always come and be near me and he was very fond of me. There would be no reason for a normal child to behave that way with someone that they are meeting for the first time.

When I made the traditional greeting of offering a scarf to the young boy, others were trying to remind him to give the scarf back to me. Even as a very young child he said, 'I know that already. I know what to do.' (*Geshe-la chuckles*)

The two other disciples of Geshe Ngawang Dhargye, Tenzing Shedrup and another person whose name I don't remember right now, were really amazed when they went to see this young boy. They related to me that meeting the boy for the first time left no doubt in their mind that this was an authentic reincarnation of Geshe Dhargye. Apparently in that instance the boy even remembered their names and greeted them by their name. That blew their mind and they were astonished; that also made them realise how reincarnation is really possible.

Before the young boy was recognised as the reincarnation of the master Geshe Ngawang Dhargye, his parents say that when he was sent to preschool as a very young toddler the teachers were quite astonished by his intelligence. When lessons were taught he did not seem to pay much attention. But later, when questioned, he was able to relate whatever was taught in the lesson. He was able to give all the answers accurately. That was seen to be, in itself, an astonishing incident.

Before we conclude for the evening we can again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time we focus on the sound of the mantra being recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra.

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
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