

---

## The Condensed Lam Rim

༄༅། །བྱང་ཆུབ་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བརྒྱུག་པ་སྟེ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

10 March 2010

---

As usual we can spend some time in meditation. As the great master Lama Tsong Khapa said, when the mind is imbued with kindness then the paths or grounds that we practice also become good. Everything is related to our state of our mind. We all agree that we do have a mind or consciousness. We also agree there are some states of mind that we recognise as being positive and other states of mind that we recognise as being negative.

Positive states of our mind have attributes of kindness, which we possess. However, at the same time we may also have some cruel states of mind, which we need to reduce. The reason why we need to cultivate and strengthen a kind mind and reduce the negative and cruel states of mind is ultimately to benefit oneself. For example, a rocky area with sharp thorns is not a comfortable place to lie down and it will immediately cause us pain. Our mental states are exactly the same. The moment that a negative state of mind manifests, it is like our mind is being pierced with thorns, which is mentally uncomfortable for us.

Just as it would be incredibly uncomfortable, almost impossible, to sleep naked in an area of thorns because of the constant pain, which would be hard to bear, similarly on a mental level if we constantly harboured a negative state of mind, then our minds would be constantly disturbed and we would not feel a real, genuine sense of wellbeing and calmness.

The main point is that for as long as we allow our mind to be influenced by negative states of mind, to that extent we will lose a real opportunity to have calm and peace in our mind. But if we cultivate positive states of mind, such as kindness, this will bring about a real sense of wellbeing. This doesn't come about easily. We need to pay attention to our own inner states and look inwards within ourselves to understand the states of mind. This can be done through the practice of meditation. But as long as we have a distracted mind, we will not be able to focus inwards.

When we look within ourselves we will find that the real problem is within us and is not caused by external factors. The problem is that we don't realise that the causes of our own problems lie within us; we are constantly blaming the external situation. If we reverse that thinking and understand that the cause lies within our own mind, then we can begin to see and tackle the real problem.

External factors can make us feel troubled, but we do have the capacity to limit our attention to external distractions. If we allow the mind to be distracted by external factors such as worrying about things, and if we allow the mind to follow those distractions, then this creates more worry within our mind, and the mind becomes completely immersed in those worries. But if we limit the distractions, if we don't allow our mind to become distracted, then we can protect our state of mind.

If we take the time to investigate how our mind works, then we would find that it really goes in this vicious circle of thinking

about something that causes us distress, and then we constantly think about it which causes us more distress, and we become unhappy. We circle around between different objects and situations that cause us distress, and we keep our focus and attention on that.

When we really look into the situation, we would have to acknowledge that in most cases it is not as if that external situation is getting worse. Even when an external situation is not getting worse, we add to our own worry with unrealistic pessimistic ideas, imagining that things are getting worse. This pessimistic imagination is what causes the mind to worry more and feel distressed. Even if things are good externally, we are tormented with worries and unrealistic paranoia inside our mind. This continually causes the mind to be distressed and unhappy. The main point is, regardless of the external situation, we need to take control over our own state of mind.

We need to identify what causes our mind to be in that vicious circle. By further investigating, we can come to understand that the main cause of the troubles in our mind is not being able to maintain an inner focus.

It becomes clear that if we don't keep our mind focussed inwards, and allow it to be completely influenced by distractions, then the mind will constantly be in a state of worry and distress. To reverse that situation, we need to take control over our own mind. We maintain control over our mind by not letting our mind be influenced by distractions. This is done by maintaining an inner focus. The result is that our mind will experience a lot of turmoil.

Meditation trains us to stop our mind from focusing outwards, and instead maintain an inner focus. When we begin to master maintaining an inner mental focus while avoiding or stopping the mind from being distracted by external objects or even recollections, thoughts and ideas, then we begin to really feel a genuine ease and calm within ourselves.

To meditate, we sit in an upright but comfortable position. We then bring and keep our focus inward by not allowing our mind to drift towards any external objects, including memories. We need to constantly bring our focus back internally and maintain that inward focus. We need to commit to that course of action.

When we bring our focus inward, we initially feel relief from all the distractions, but it is hard to maintain that inner focus if we don't have an actual object to focus on. Thus this meditation technique uses our own breath as the object of focus. We must maintain 100 per cent focus on the breath. One way of doing this is to keep a count of the breath as we breathe in and breathe out. This helps us to maintain focus on the breath itself. So, for the next few minutes we will bring our full attention and awareness upon our breath.

*[meditation]*

Excuse my coughing; it may have brought you out of your meditation! That might have been a little hindrance to your focus and meditation, but if I apologise I suppose that will be fine.

The actual act of apologising seems to be a very good mechanism to free ourselves from a lot of mishaps. When you say "sorry", it seems that you can actually be pardoned, that many misdeeds can be pardoned. We can see that in everyday life when an apology is made, it seems that a lot of unwanted problems can be avoided. So, it is a good thing.

Following on from the earlier topic that was covered in the text, the immediately preceding topic was in relation to the type of "vessel" or type of person that is suited to liberation. Having

---

---

explained that, the text went on to explain that a suitable vessel is someone who is endowed with the eight freedoms and ten endowments. But what are the paths that a person needs to follow to obtain liberation?

To follow the outline from the text, we come to a second category from an earlier topic that is the same category which is addressed here as “the type of path one cultivates to overturn the cycle of existence.” In relation to this outline, an instance of cyclic existence would be our physical body. Our physical body is an example of something that is within the cycle of existence. This contaminated body that we possess has limitations, which means we cannot really experience real ease and peace with this body. It is confined with many shortcomings. We don’t really have control over our body; we can’t control sickness for example. The body we have is a body that suffers; this is the nature of cycle of existence. A body that is completely free of all defects and faults is a body that will allow us to experience comfort and peace without any suffering; it is a body that is free from the cycle of existence. We would have complete control over such a body. This means we are overturning the cycle of existence in relation to our body. We can overcome the current limitations of our body and achieve a body endowed with the qualities of liberation.

We don’t have control over our physical body to begin with; it is subject to pain, illness, and decay. Why don’t we have control over our own body? Because the body is under the control of delusions and karma. It is a product of delusions and karma, and this means it is controlled by delusions and karma. For as long as our body is under the influence of delusions and karma, it is naturally subject to pain, misery and decay. But it is possible to overcome these limitations of the body and to obtain a body that is endowed with the freedom of liberation. So what are the paths that lead to liberation and can give us a body free from pain and misery? The teachings present the actual paths, identifying what actions we need to take in order to achieve a body of freedom.

When we consider the plight of our physical body, its limitations etc, it becomes evident that it is very difficult to protect or satisfy this body. We all know that we need warmth, but if we become too hot it becomes a problem. We need to be cool, but if it’s too cold then that becomes a problem. We need to feed our body, so we need to eat, but if we overeat then that becomes a problem. If we don’t eat it becomes a problem. There are so many other needs just in relation to the body. We become busier and busier in life in order to satisfy its needs. And yet it can never really be completely satisfied. Our body is always in the nature of being subject to decay and misery. This is an important point to consider.

Our body has its limitations. No matter how much effort and how much time we put into nurturing the body, the very nature of the body is that it will decay. Our body never reaches a state where it becomes indestructible or “super”. Of course, when a child is growing up we could say that when the body is nurtured, it does progress and become an adult’s body. But for adults, it is clear that no matter how much time and energy we expend in trying to maintain our physical body, it is always going to decay eventually. Slowly, all the signs of decay start to become more evident. Regardless of the time and energy we spend, there is some limitation to the body. This is also true when someone trains for a sport. We can see that—for example jumping, something like long jump or high jump—there is a certain measurement that the body can achieve. But beyond that, it’s not possible. Our bodies are not like a superhuman body where it can achieve the unachievable. But the mind is

different. By spending time and energy in sustaining and nourishing the mind in a positive way, the qualities of the mind can only increase; it can only become better and better rather than decaying and becoming worse. So when we look at the difference between our physical level and our mental level, it becomes much more reasonable to spend more time and energy in nourishing and maturing our mind and to improve our state of the mind, because mental improvement will not contribute to the decay of the mind but instead will only increase the positive qualities of the mind.

As mentioned earlier, when we invest more time and energy in acquiring the qualities to improve our state of the mind, then that will not only help to maintain a happy state of mind, but will also contribute to our physical wellbeing. Someone who is in a perpetual happy state of mind definitely has better health and a longer life. Their lifespan is increased because of their happy state of mind. They are also better able to cope with old age. I personally have a few old friends who have reached their 80s and 90s and they are in a happy state of mind. They don’t seem to be troubled by their age; they seem to be able to cope quite well with their age. This is due to the happy state of mind that they have cultivated during their life.

On the other end of the spectrum, we can see some elderly people who are not that happy and content. They have a lot of health issues and problems and also their minds are not so happy. This affects their physical health. Those of us who are in the middle age range can take note of these examples and strive to achieve a positive state of mind. Since we are all heading that direction, we need to prepare ourselves to live happily in our old age. Working to improve our state of mind will definitely contribute to that. Some older people have no real problem with being in a late stage of life; they are happy and joyful to live as long as they can.

A positive state of mind can be summed up as having a kind attitude. If we work towards cultivating and developing a kind attitude within ourselves, towards ourselves and others, then this state of mind will contribute to our overall wellbeing at any age. Whether we are alone or with others, a kind and gentle attitude is something that will never let us down. Spending time and energy in cultivating a kind, gentle attitude within ourselves is ultimately our best companion. It is a matter of changing our attitude; this is what it really comes down to. Changing our attitude gives us the opportunity to cultivate a more kind and gentle attitude. I am saying this from my own experience. Based on my own experience, I feel confident in sharing with you that it is possible to change our attitudes. Because of my experiences in life, I can vouch for that. Based on that experience, I feel compelled to share these insights with you; and to constantly remind you to try to change your attitude and to cultivate a kinder and gentler attitude, because it is possible. That is why I seem to be repeating things; it is because I want to get that message across to you.

A kind and gentle attitude is an attitude that is useful for us in our everyday life situations. And even with our relationships with our companions, our partners or friends, it is this element of kindness and gentleness that will naturally lead to a real solace between friends and companions. It is this attitude that will draw others into your life and will make your time together with them enjoyable. In whatever situation, if we are at home, going on holidays, or having a meal with someone, in all facets of our life, whatever we are doing, we can actually enjoy it when we have that quality and attitude of kindness and gentleness. So it is really worthwhile to try to cultivate and establish that within ourselves.

---

Developing attitudes of kindness and gentleness is possible. If it was beyond our reach, if it was not possible, then it is irrelevant to even mention it. But these attitudes are something that is possible to achieve; it is within our reach. That is something that we need to really understand.

The very fact that there are people who exist, living with a happy state of mind, who are imbued with gentleness and kindness, means that it is also possible for us to achieve this state ourselves too. We have the same characteristics and the same attributes as other people. We also have the potential to achieve any happy state that others have reached. If we can't find anyone who is genuinely kind, gentle and happy, then it is questionable whether or not it is possible for us to achieve that state. If there is no-one that we can point out as being a happy person, then we could legitimately have doubts about ourselves ever achieving a happy state of mind. But the fact remains that there are many people who are happy in this world. This is not just a theory, it is not just speculation. There are in fact people who are genuinely happy, so this is a reason to believe that it is possible for us too.

People who are extremely kind serve as an example for us to be inspired and to encourage us to improve and to reach a state of being genuinely kind and happy ourselves. This is how we begin to understand the intricacy of the Dharma teachings, of how we are all in some way or another connected and inspired by that. We are inspired to improve ourselves. This only becomes obvious when we really take the time to observe our inner selves, and really look within rather than allowing our mind to become completely distracted all the time. If we can spend some time looking within ourselves, then these facts become more and more obvious to us.

Before we conclude for the evening we can spend a few minutes in meditation. And this time we focus upon the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

*Transcribed from tape by Peter Boothby and Mandy Vicsai*

*Edit 1 by Cynthia Karena*

*Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe*

*Edited Version*

*© Tara Institute*