
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

26 May 2010

It may be good to spend some time for meditation. As we can assume that we are a gathering of meditators, it would be appropriate to engage in some meditation. Thus, for the purpose of meditation, please sit in a relaxed but upright position. Likewise, it is good to try to induce a bright and clear state of mind. Just adopting the appropriate physical posture and a relaxed state of mind that is bright and clear, of itself induces a sense of joy and relaxation in the mind. When others observe us they might get a feeling, 'Oh, this person must be in a very peaceful state'.

Then, based on having the appropriate physical posture and mental frame, a clear and bright state of mind, it is quite possible to generate a good motivation. The importance of having a good motivation in one's mind, or what is commonly understood as a good intention in one's mind, is because each state of mind is preceded by an earlier moment of mind. If we intentionally develop a good intention then the following moment of mind will naturally be conducive and positive.

When we notice this fact for ourselves we will see the appropriateness of developing a good intention or good motivation, because we want our practice or any action to have positive results. If it is preceded by a positive mind what follows will also be of a positive nature. If we have a good motivation, our meditation will also be good.

If we pay attention, we would notice that if we wake up in a clear and bright state of mind with good intentions, the rest of the day seems to be more positive. There is definitely a significant outcome depending on the state of mind we have when we wake up in the morning. When we start the day with a clear and bright state of mind, followed by good intentions in our mind, it will induce a joyous state of mind. If we start our day in that joyous state of mind then whatever activities that follow will also be joyous. When we have breakfast it will be more enjoyable than the times when our mind is unsettled. Likewise when we go to work in that good frame of mind, our work seems to be more enjoyable. The conditions at work also seem to be better.

What I am pointing out is that we should make an effort to analyse our state of mind and when we notice that our mind is not clear and bright and bit confused, then we can make the attempt to change that state of mind. Developing a positive state of mind is something that is within our reach, so if we apply the effort of analysing our mind and then form a positive state of mind, it will bring us the great benefit. This is something that we would notice.

What helps us to develop a clear state of mind is with the technique of meditation. The practice of meditation helps us to set our mind in a good frame. We would notice that whatever activities we engage in, if our frame of mind is positive then things work out better; we get better results. So, it is really worthwhile to consider the technique that brings that about, which is meditation.

Conversely, when we notice that we are a little bit confused and have problems in our life, if we were to analyse and pinpoint the cause, we would recognise that this is due to allowing our mind to be in a distracted state. If we were to investigate our frame of mind on a regular basis we would notice that our mind is mostly focussed outwards and influenced by the distractions. Our mind is habituated in focusing outwards on external things rather than focusing within oneself. That is what brings the problems, difficulties, in our life. When we think about it we would notice that this is what creates the difficulties within oneself and one's life.

When we begin to notice this for ourselves we will also begin to recognise that when we try the technique of withdrawing our attention from being focused externally and bring our attention and focus inwards onto an internal object it definitely gives the mind some relief. Our mind will become much more settled.

We will now adopt the meditation technique of focusing on our breath. First of all we bring our focus inwards and, having applied some commitment and effort to bring our focus inwards, we then place our focus upon the object of our meditation, which is our breath. We need to withdraw our focus from external and internal distractions such as our thoughts and bring our full attention and focus to place it on our breath. When we breathe in we are completely aware of our breath coming in and as we breathe out we are fully aware of the breath leaving nostrils. If we just keep our full attention on that it should help to keep our mind focussed. So, this is what we will engage in for the next few minutes. (*Pause for meditation.*)

The meditation we have just done is not really that difficult and it is something that we can manage to do. If one does this meditation regularly it will definitely be useful. The benefit of a regular practice, such as we did now, is that due to the familiarity we gain with keeping our attention and focus inwards on a particular object, it will become easier for us to keep our attention span on positive things. If we have a negative state of mind we will be able to notice that and try to reverse it. Overcoming that negative state of mind also becomes little bit easier.

As the technique involves completely withdrawing our mind from distractions and keeping our mind focussed on a chosen object, during the time that we focus on the breath our mind will not be preoccupied with negative states and all forms of distractions. During that period of meditation we will have a positive frame of mind and our familiarity with that will help us to prolong positive states of mind. When we come out of the actual meditation it is not the case, of course, that we will not have any negative states of mind again. We may still be influenced by negative states of mind but it will be easier

to notice this and thus easier to reverse it. That is the practical benefit.

We might find that normally we are completely influenced by negative states of mind and negative attitudes. The reason it is difficult to come out of that frame of mind is because we fail to notice that we are in a negative frame of mind or have a negative attitude to begin with. The extent to which we don't notice it escalates the problem further. The practice that we have done now is a technique that will eventually allow us to notice that our mind is in a negative state or influenced by negative attitudes.

We might notice that there are times when the thoughts that we have, or our frame of mind or attitude, is not particularly negative but our mind is still a little disturbed and we are unsettled. We might notice that sometimes. For example, when a close friend, associate or companion is not well it might cause discomfort and unease in our mind. The fact that they are unwell or going through a difficult time may cause a state of mind of unease or discomfort, but is not a negative state of mind. Even though it brings some unease and discomfort within oneself it prompts us to extend ourselves to be of service and help to the other who is in a difficult situation. The state of mind that extends our help and concern for the other is actually a positive frame of mind that we call genuine love or concern for the other. We might argue that although feeling empathy or love for the other brings a little discomfort and unease to oneself, it is worthwhile to the extent that it prompts us to do something to help the other and be of service. So that is worthwhile state of mind.

When we notice someone is in distress or a difficult situation and we experience unease and discomfort in our mind, we are feeling empathy with the others suffering and not wishing them to have that suffering. Not being able to bear their suffering is defined in Buddhist terms as 'compassion'. If one has a genuine wish for them to be happy that is called 'love' from the Buddhist point of view.

When we have a sense of compassion, not being able to bear their suffering and wanting to alleviate that suffering, and wanting them to be joyful and happy, which is love, that is called feeling 'love and compassion towards the other'. This prompts us to do something to help the other to be free from pain and suffering and to obtain a state of joy and happiness.

It is actually a good sign if we feel a sense of unease and discomfort when we see others suffering, particularly in relation to someone that we associate with or know well, and who we consider to be a companion. If they are feeling distress or in a difficult situation and we feel discomfort and unease within oneself I would consider that a good sign. Whereas if we feel at ease and relaxed when others are suffering and in distress then I would consider that a bad sign.

To recap, the main point is that developing love and compassion and further cultivating positive states of mind is done through the practice of meditation.

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

4.2.2.1.2.2.4. Resolving the nature of the path that leads to liberation

4.2.2.1.2.2.4.2. The actual resolution of the nature of the path

4.2.2.1.2.2.4.2.2. The type of path one cultivates to overturn cyclic existence

4.2.2.1.2.2.4.2.2.3. The way to train in ethics

4.2.2.1.2.2.4.2.2.3.4. How to train in ethics

4.2.2.1.2.2.4.2.2.3.4.1. Instructions on the four antidotes for abandoning downfalls

The topic that we are covering from the text explains the four causes of an infraction, which means the four causes or conditions that allow one's moral ethics to lapse. As explained in our previous session, the first cause is not knowing the precepts. As a remedy for not knowing the precept, one must listen to and understand the precepts. The second cause or condition for an infraction is carelessness or an unconscientious mind. As a remedy for unconscientiousness one must train in the attitudes of mindfulness and introspection. The third cause is disrespect. If we don't have respect for our teachers, and the teachings themselves, that causes us to weaken and breach our moral ethics. As a remedy for that one cultivates respect for the teacher and the teachings. The fourth cause is the various afflictions, or various negative states of mind. We will now explain the remedy to that.

To remedy the afflictions in our mind, we must examine our mind and apply the appropriate remedy to the dominant affliction—whatever affliction is strongest in our mind. As explained in the teachings, there are particular remedies or antidotes for overcoming particular afflictions. For those who predominantly have a very distracted mind, the remedy is to focus on one's breath.

The reason focusing on the breath serves as a very good remedy to overcome a distracted mind is because of the particular characteristics of breath. First of all it is an internal object; an object that is more within oneself. Focusing internally helps us to overcome the external distractions. Then, the breath by its nature is colourless and shapeless, and that in itself causes less distraction for the mind. Because it doesn't have colour and shape it is an object that allows our mind to be more settled and focussed.

We find when we pay attention and analyse our own mind one we will be able to recognise the harm and the unease or discomfort that afflictions cause us. When we really think about it, we will begin to notice that whatever problem we might be experiencing it is related to a mind that is filled with afflictions. When the mind is affected by afflictions one would notice that there is no joy in whatever one engages in. When we eat, there is a lack of joy. When we travel, there is a lack of joy. When we associate with others, there is a lack of joy within one's mind.

That lack of joy experienced within oneself is because of the afflictions in the mind. When we are able to pinpoint that what causes the lack of joy is an afflicted mind, that

understanding or recognition of the afflictions will help us to loosen the grip of whatever negativity in our mind. Things will become little bit more joyful. When we eat it becomes a little bit more joyous. When we travel around it becomes little bit more joyful. Sleep will become more pleasurable. The company of others becomes more enjoyable. That is the practical benefit. As mentioned earlier, one will also have good sleep. (*Geshe-la laughs.*)

Not being able to sleep well is quite a prominent problem for many people. If one analyses why one lacks good sleep, why one is not able to sleep well, it really comes down to the afflictions in the mind. One of the means to reduce that preoccupied state of mind and distractions in the mind is focusing on the breath. If before going to bed we do some meditation just focusing on the breath, our sleep will be good and sound because our mind becomes more calm and peaceful.

Going back to the earlier point, the remedy for overcoming a hyperactive state of mind, a mind filled with distractions and lots of superstitions, is engaging in meditation focusing on one's breath. That will definitely help.

If one finds that one is disturbed or afflicted by anger, that the predominant affliction in one's mind is anger, then the remedy is meditation on love. Meditation on love is a remedy for anger.

If one finds the predominant affliction within one's mind is attachment to a particular object then the remedy is to meditate on the natural faults of the object. We say 'faults' but the appropriate translation may be the unattractive attributes of the object. To understand how focusing on the unattractive attributes of the object becomes a remedy, we first of all need to understand the mind of attachment.

When we notice attachment towards an object we would notice that the mind focuses on the object as being very attractive, very beautiful, and desire for the object arises. To the extent that one sees the object as being attractive, to that degree, one will have attachment to the object. That is something that we begin to notice. The mind of attachment or desire is a state of mind that focuses on the attractive features or attributes of the object and exaggerates those qualities. Being mindful of the unattractive attributes of the object will oppose the state of mind that focuses only on the attractiveness of the object. The attractiveness of the object begins to naturally reduce and thus attachment reduces.

We can use a particular example. If we are attracted to a person then, during the time of strong infatuation or attraction to the person we will only be focusing on the beautiful, pleasing attributes of the person. When we begin to focus on the unattractive features of the person then the attachment to the person will naturally reduce.

If, when we are attracted to another person, we were to honestly look into that mode of attraction we would find that that attraction is related to their physical appearance, the physical body. The particular meditation focusing on the unattractive attributes of the person is related to the unattractive attributes of the body. In focussing on the unattractive attributes of the body we can begin with our

own body rather than using the body of someone else. If we analyse our own body, from the bottom of the feet to the top our heads, and we go beyond the skin and look into the parts that make up our body, particularly our internal organs and so forth, we will begin to notice that there is nothing really that attractive. The matter that makes up our body is not that attractive. In fact it can be quite repulsive. Thus attachment to the body will naturally reduce when we focus on the unattractive attributes of our body.

The reason I mentioned focusing on our own body to begin with is because of the comments that others have made to me. When the traditional meditation of focusing on the unattractive attributes of the body is applied to another body it usually refers to someone that one is attached to. Some people have confided in me that when they try to focus on the unattractive aspects of others bodies it does help somewhat to reduce attachment but it is very difficult to do so. It is very difficult to see them as unattractive because the person is quite attractive and pleasing. (*Geshe-la laughs*)

Because the person is pleasing it is hard for them to think that they are unattractive and unpleasing. They are being very honest which can be true. So if one finds it hard to focus on the body of someone that one is attracted to as an object to reduce one's attachment, then focusing on one's own body and thinking about the unattractive aspects of one's own body will help to reduce the strong sense of attachment.

In the meditation there is a part that involves analysing from the bottom of the feet and slowly moving upwards. First investigate the nature of your feet, then legs all the way to the top of your head. The main point in applying the remedy for overcoming attachment is trying to overcome the strong, infatuated mind of attachment that really disturbs us. We can then work slowly to overcoming subtler levels of attachment.

Another afflicted state of mind is pride. The remedy to overcome pride is to meditate on the constituents and so forth. This relates to the various different elements and constituents that exist within oneself. Even within one's own body there are many different elements, subtleties of the elements and constituents that one may fail to completely understand right now. There are many aspects of our body that we are not really fully aware of. When we think about that fact that we fail to fully understand our own body completely that awareness can reduce pride within oneself.

Further methods to overcome pride are said to be meditating on the transitory nature of things, what we call impermanence and death and sickness and so forth. Anyone who is quite proud naturally becomes humbled when they get sick. Humility naturally depletes the sense of strong pride. Likewise the fact of death definitely can reduce pride. The prospect of one becoming old and ill will definitely reduce pride within oneself. These are said to be good meditation techniques to overcome pride.

Another afflicted state of mind is ignorance or stupor, the state of now knowing. The remedy to overcoming an ignorant state of mind is meditating on the interdependent origination of things.

Then, a remedy to overcome all afflicted states of mind, a combination of all afflicted states of mind, is to meditate on the nature of reality or emptiness, the empty nature of all things. The wisdom realising emptiness is said to be a remedy to overcoming all afflictions.

To recap, the main point is that recognising the various different afflictions in one's mind and tackling the most dominant affliction in one's mind is the way to improve one's state of mind. One identifies the most dominant affliction in one's mind and applies a remedy to that first. One then slowly works to overcome different afflictions in one's mind at different times.

The faults of the afflicted mind were explained in great detail in our previous sessions. The main point in recognising the faults of the afflictions is to relate it to oneself. How does it affect us? For example, when one is in an angry state of mind and we experience strong anger, who does it actually harm initially? The recipient of the ill-effects of anger is oneself. So, if one does not wish to experience the repercussions of anger then it is our own responsibility to try to overcome anger.

The teachings say that one of the most harmful afflictions is pride. When anyone has a strong sense of pride, that really harms one in the long run, but it also harms others. It harms oneself by destroying the opportunity of having good relationships and good companions. No one enjoys someone who is filled with pride. No one will enjoy the company of someone who is very proud, because pride is a state of mind where one has a natural tendency to denigrate others, looking down upon them. That is as an attitude that is not welcomed by anyone. It is not a pleasant attitude for anyone to experience. The teachings say that pride is the main stem of many problems in our life. Recognising the ill-effects of afflictions in our mind becomes the impetus for us to do something to apply remedies to overcome them.

We can conclude here for the evening. Before we end the session let us again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time the object that we focus on will be the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. We keep our full attention and focus on the sound itself as we hear the mantra being recited.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed from tape by Su Lan Foo
Edit 1 by John Burch
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version
© Tara Institute*