
The Condensed Lam Rim

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

4 August 1010

As usual, being in a relaxed position, we can engage in some meditation. A truly relaxed state exists when we adopt a technique that allows our busy mind to subside. We definitely get some benefit from this. The real purpose of meditation is to familiarise ourselves with a kind attitude, which in turn enhances a kind attitude within. What is the result of having a kind attitude? It is worthwhile to consider the purpose of doing a meditation practice.

One thing that we need to understand is that the mind is the initiator of all verbal and physical activities. These activities fall into three categories: positive, which bring about a positive result; negative, which lead to bad consequences; and neutral, neither positive nor negative but somewhere in between. This applies on both verbal and physical levels.

When we scrutinise the types of activities we do, they fall into one of these three categories. Thus, our activities are either positive, negative or neutral. We are busy all the time, so we are typically engaging in some sort of activity most of the time. Bearing that in mind, when we look into whatever activity we are doing, it becomes clear to us whether that activity is virtuous—what we call a positive activity—or whether it's a negative activity.

When we notice that we are engaging in a positive activity, we can look into what type of mind sets this off. We find this state of mind to be one with a kind attitude. A kind mind renders whatever activity we do pleasing to ourselves and to others; it benefits us and benefits others. A kind attitude initiates a positive activity.

In contrast, there are some activities we engage in that make us feel uncomfortable. And they make others feel uncomfortable too. We can look into what state of mind that initiates these kinds of activities. This state of mind is a negative state of mind, a mind that is not imbued with kindness but which is selfish and unruly. We can see that there are positive activities that will make us and others feel comfortable, and negative activities that make us and others feel uncomfortable.

Again, in contrast to these negative and positive activities, there are other activities we engage in that are initiated by thoughts such as "I need to go for a walk" or "I need to sit down somewhere" or "I need to eat or sleep". These activities and the state of mind that initiates them are both considered neutral.

When we can clearly distinguish between the different types of activities—positive, negative, neutral—that are initiated by the corresponding states of mind, then we will be able to identify the consequences of each state of

mind. For example, the consequences of a kind attitude are positive activities. The consequences of a negative mind are negative activities that make everyone feel uncomfortable. So therefore we need to familiarise our mind with a kind attitude.

Having analysed the link between mind and action in this way, it becomes clear that the positive mind that initiates positive activities—which is mainly the kind attitude—is precious and thus we need to preserve and protect it. Being mindful allows us to protect our positive state of mind. Mindfulness and awareness are achieved by constantly familiarising ourselves with the positive state of mind of kindness. This ensures that we engage in positive activities physically and verbally, and becomes the major part of our practice. One of the best meditations is to maintain a mindfulness of protecting kind attitudes, which ensures positive activities will follow from that. If someone were to ask me what is one of the best meditations, then I would have to say that applying mindfulness to protect our kind attitude is one of the best meditations.

We need to pay attention to protecting our positive state of mind, as we are the ones who will ultimately benefit from that. As we familiarise ourselves with maintaining positive states of mind, we come to notice that our general state of mind becomes much more calm, much more peaceful. We will also develop more clarity in our mind. By familiarising ourselves with a kind attitude, we gain so many other positive frames of mind, such as clarity and calmness within ourselves. And ultimately a real sense of joy too. Thus this means we need to protect and ensure that our mind is in a positive, kind state. This helps us to fulfil many of the activities that we wish to engage in, and removes a lot of difficulties in our life.

In contrast, if we have negative attitudes within ourselves, the attitudes of selfishness or wishing to harm others, then these kinds of attitudes bring about more difficulties and more problems in our life. Therefore we are indebted to ourselves to bring about a good result, a more beneficial outcome for our own well-being.

When we categorise our states of mind into positive and negative, we will begin to realise that the more we familiarise ourselves with a positive state of mind, the more the positive outcome of that contributes to our overall well-being, including good health and a calm and peaceful mind. Naturally we will also have more friends. When we are in a positive state of mind, that influences us to engage in positive activities that are seen as pleasant by others. Pleasant mannerisms and pleasant speech naturally draw more people closer to you. The friends you already have are drawn even closer to you. The trust and kinship or friendship with them becomes deeper. We all naturally want and need friendship in our life. So therefore it is worthwhile to understand how genuine friendships and companionships are developed. It is again through the positive states of mind, which influence us to engage in positive activities.

In contrast, when we allow our mind to be in a negative state and do nothing to overcome it, then our negative state of mind will influence us to become close-minded. This affects our mannerisms, our behaviours, and our

speech; they are all tainted with negativity. This negative state of mind contributes to putting a distance between yourself and others. Whatever companions you may have will start to become more distant. And with people who are already distant, the gap will become even bigger. We begin to slowly lose people that we like and trust. We might then experience the pangs of loneliness. This all comes from a negative state of mind. This is the main point that I am stressing here.

When we are able to clearly see the difference between the advantages of a positive state of mind and the disadvantages of a negative state of mind, then we will voluntarily make some effort in acquainting ourselves more with a positive state of mind and trying to reduce the negative states of mind. All of that is done through the practice of meditation. This is why I am emphasising the technique of meditation as being beneficial and useful in life. We need not think about the long-term benefits of future lives. Even in this life, within our immediate situation we can begin to see a transformation taking place and we begin to get a real sense of the benefit of familiarising ourselves with a positive state of mind through the practice of meditation.

As I emphasise, we need to acquaint ourselves with positive states of mind, which will bring us benefits, and we need to try to reduce negative states of mind, which will bring about negative consequences for us and others.

I emphasise all of this with some personal experience. My firsthand experience of having negative consequences from a negative state of mind goes back to when I was a young boy in my hometown in Tibet in the Kham region. When I was young, we used to have fights with other kids. There was one time where I was surrounded by five other kids. It was only myself and another boy and we were being attacked. First of all we were being abused verbally and then it started getting physical. At that time we just had stones available to us. I couldn't really even fight back because we were outnumbered by five.

They threw stones and hit me on the back and I was bleeding and red all over. But in that state of being very worked up with wanting to get even with them, I didn't even feel the pain at that time. The only intention I had was how to get even with them and fight back. So that goes to show that in a negative state of mind you completely ignore harm to yourself. However, I lost.

Later on, one of the older boys from that group attacked me, personally threatening me with a knife. However, I was able to pick up a big stone and hit him first, somewhere on the neck. It must have hit one of the nerves because he fell down and could not get up and attack me. So that time I seemingly won. However, in both cases someone was harmed. In the first incident I was harmed; in the second incident another person was harmed. The moral of the story is that from a negative state of mind there is no real 'win' situation. Someone will always eventually lose from that and suffer from the consequences.

When I entered the monastery, I noticed that this boy who attacked me earlier also was in the monastery and our rooms were quite close to each other! Initially when we noticed each other in the monastery, we were both a

little bit apprehensive. He sort of looked at me in a sheepish way, recognising who I was. I also was a little bit apprehensive. But we were not frowning at each other; we were just looking at each other, then almost beginning to smile.

For a while we just kept our distance, but whenever we noticed each other we might just give a small smile. Eventually we started to get to know each other and become best friends. We became such good friends that we would share anything we had between us. Whenever he had something nice, some goodies, he would come and share it with me. And I would share mine with him. And we started up teaming up to defend ourselves against others who would bully us.

It came to a point that when anyone teased me, he couldn't bear that. Likewise, if anyone teased him I couldn't bear that either. Our kinship and closeness got to the point where if I was not around, he would feel uneasy. That feeling of kinship and closeness - where did that come from? It comes from having a kind attitude on both sides. Because we turned our mind around and developed a kind attitude toward each other, that brought about that good strong companionship.

The moral of the story from my life is that when we have a negative state of mind, then every expression, verbal or physical, is influenced by that negative state of mind. This makes others feel uncomfortable; it is threatening. It makes others feel uneasy. Naturally others will want to defend and protect themselves because we express negativity. That is of course mutual from either side. But if we have a positive state of mind, our pleasant mannerisms draw in others.

The main point to consider is the benefit and well-being for ourselves and our life. The causes for this are within us, as are the causes of our problems.

In conclusion, there are clearly positive states of mind that influence our whole being in a positive way. That is something that we need to familiarise ourselves with through the practice of meditation and being mindful of that. Likewise, there are certain attitudes and states of mind that are negative, which influence our whole being and mannerisms and behaviours to be negative and unpleasing for ourselves and others. We need to recognise that and try to reduce negative states of mind. Thus, I encourage you to maintain a positive frame of mind.

With this awareness, we now adopt the appropriate posture for meditation. Physically try to sit in an upright, relaxed posture. Mentally, to the best of your ability, try to develop a positive state of mind for doing the practice—what we call a positive motivation. The main point is to develop a certain sense of commitment for our practice, which involves intentionally withdrawing our focus and attention from all forms of distractions, external as well as internal distractions, and bring our full attention and focus within. As we bring our focus within, we may be able to maintain it just for a short while. Then we focus specifically upon our breath. Based on our natural breathing, the inflow and outflow of our breath, we bring about a 100% focus on the breath itself.

Maintain that focus and attention on the breath for the next few minutes as we meditate. (*pause for meditation*)

4.2.2.1.2. The actual way to take the essence

4.2.2.1.2.3. The way to train the mind in the stages of the path of beings of the great scope

4.2.2.1.2.3.1. The link

4.2.2.1.2.3.1.4. The need to develop joy about the possibility of entering a path by which one's own and other's welfare can be completely accomplished and the subsequent need to enter into the path.

We are up to the fourth subdivision of the earlier category. This subdivision reads: The need to develop joy about the possibility of entering a path by which one's own and other's welfare can be completely accomplished and the subsequent need to enter into the path.

Having mentioned all of the qualities of the Great Vehicle path earlier, we will begin developing joy at the possibility of entering into this path. The next step then is to actually enter the path of the Great Vehicle. When we consider the description of the Great Vehicle or what we call a practitioner of the great scope, it is mainly related to the ways and means we can benefit others, and how to be kind to them. For a practitioner of the great scope, the welfare of others is more important and taken into much greater consideration than one's own welfare. But how does an attitude of considering others' welfare as being of primary importance come about? There's no question that this attitude is based on having a genuine attitude of kindness. For the great scope practitioner, that genuine attitude of kindness, that unconditional attitude of kindness is based upon unbiased love and unbiased compassion.

Unbiased love and unbiased compassion means developing a genuine sense of unconditional love and a compassionate attitude towards all, indiscriminately focused on all beings. For someone who has developed this unbiased love and unbiased compassion within their mind, then naturally the main concern in their mind is the welfare of other beings. The practical way to benefit other beings is through practising the six perfections, such as generosity and so forth. Bodhisattvas engage in the deeds of the six perfections in order to benefit other beings.

When unbiased love is developed and stabilised within us, then the wish to benefit others comes about naturally. To give a worldly analogy, the main focus of interest for parents who have a genuine love and concern for their children is the children's welfare. So whatever they do, it is for the benefit of their children. They work in a job so they can pay for their children's education, to bring them up, and even when they buy a house it is done in the interest of the children. There are families whose primary concern is for the welfare and benefit of their children. The parents' activities are in the interests of the children as they have a genuine concern for their welfare. We can definitely see that this is the case. There are many families where both parents have the same goal to benefit their children and therefore work towards that end.

Likewise, we can see that a bodhisattva is a being who has unbiased love and compassion and who has further developed the altruistic awakening mind, which is called

bodhichitta. When bodhichitta has developed within the mind, the primary concern is the welfare of other sentient beings. This can be likened to when we experience strong attachment towards an object. Whenever that object comes to mind, without any effort it produces a strong sense of attachment towards it. As soon as we see that object or think about that object, attachment comes very strongly without much effort.

For the bodhisattva, the welfare of other sentient beings is due to their compassion and their genuine sense of unbiased love. Thinking of how to benefit them comes up spontaneously and vividly in a bodhisattva's mind again and again. This is how the primary concern of benefiting and helping others takes place in the bodhisattva.

Having described the criteria and the great qualities of a bodhisattva, we need to try to use that information in a practical way to benefit ourselves. We should try to feel inspired and encouraged to practise just like the bodhisattva. If we feel inspired with that attitude, even though we may not have been able to develop it right now, we can begin to change our attitude about our approach to others around us right now.

Right now our situation might be that when we think about someone who is close and dear to us, our sense of compassion, love, kindness and concern comes about naturally and spontaneously. But as soon as we think about someone who we disagree with or who we don't get along with, then love and compassion goes out of the window. We don't have love and compassion for someone that we have a disagreement with, or someone we dislike.

We need to first of all acknowledge that, then we need to realise that if we maintain such an attitude then there is no way for us to develop unbiased love and compassion towards all beings. On a practical level, for those we associate with in our daily lives, we can try to change our attitude, even towards those people we may have had a disagreement with or a dislike towards. We can try to slowly develop a sense of love and compassion towards them, even if it's on a mental level.

If we can slowly try to develop that in our practice, then we will begin to transform our entire being, and our way of life. We begin with those around us, with those that we associate with in our daily lives. Then, based on that, based on making a small transformation in our daily lives, we can begin to slowly expand our attitude to all living beings.

At our level right now, as an ordinary being, it is of course natural that we don't have the unbiased love and compassion that a bodhisattva has towards all living beings. So we may not be able to practice benefitting others on the same level as a bodhisattva. That doesn't mean that we are completely incapable of expressing any love and compassion to anyone. That is not that case.

We can express genuine love and compassion to those around us now, at whatever level we're capable of doing, at whatever capacity we have now. We can begin to express some love and compassion and benefit for others based on our own level of practice. We can constantly be inspired to practise one day like a bodhisattva, even if it

is with aspirational prayers. We can pray, 'May I be able to practice like a bodhisattva in developing unbiased, indiscriminative love and compassion for all sentient beings and work towards that end to bring about benefit to them all. May I be able to do so, may my meagre activities now of benefitting few become a cause to do that'. This is a practical approach to our practice that we can start immediately.

To quote from the great master Shantideva, as he says in his great work *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, there's no need to mention much, we can clearly see the distinction between the two, ordinary beings and the Buddha. The first are the beings who, because of their concern for merely themselves, are still in samsara. Whereas the attitudes and activities of the Buddha means he has reached a state of becoming fully enlightened. In brief, the distinction between cherishing and thinking only about oneself and the benefits of thinking about all other living beings can be seen in the difference between ordinary beings and the Great Enlightened Being, the Buddha.

Shantideva is saying that it is possible, through understanding the benefits of cherishing and working towards the welfare and benefit of all sentient beings, to develop the familiarity and the affinity of great love and compassion within our hearts. Through that familiarity it is possible.

The main point that we need to consider in relation to that quote by Shantideva is that at one time the Buddha was exactly the same as ourselves, an ordinary being that was in samsara. So all our faults and short-comings and the ones we see in others are exactly what the Buddha at one time also had. But it is due to having removed the negativities, the stains within his own mind that he developed great love and compassion and worked towards the welfare of all sentient beings, and so became enlightened.

This is an important point for us to consider—that someone who was exactly like ourselves, full of faults and negativities transformed their mind and gained enlightenment due to the practice of removing one fault at a time and progressing stage by stage. If it is possible for someone who was ordinary being once upon a time, it is definitely possible for us as well, because we have all the conditions to practise. At our level, we can follow that example and remove our negativities one at a time and develop whatever positive qualities we can.

I used to engage in fights with other boys back in my home town in Tibet, and they saw me many years later when I grew up. Even though we were from the same home town, they entered another monastery called Drepung Monastery whereas I went to a monastery near Lhasa called Sera Monastery. After 1959 the Chinese took over Tibet and we escaped into India. All the monks from all the different monasteries settled in a place in India called Buxar. Some of the monks there were from my home town and knew me when I was a boy. When they saw me after many years, they seemed to be astonished and surprised, "Oh that very naughty robust boy turned out to be OK; a real transformation has taken place." It is not the case that I have subdued my mind, but outwardly

I had definitely shown a strong earnest interest in studies. Because of this, I had a demeanour of being subdued and calm. This is what they noticed.

However, even though I may have made many mistakes, I hadn't made a mistake in pursuing my studies.

Before we conclude the session, we can take a few more minutes to engage in some meditation. This time the focus of our meditation is on the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. As the mantra is being recited, try to maintain a 100% focus on the sound itself. As the sound subsides, and as the mantra recitation stops, we can just remain in that focused state on the residue of the sound of the mantra for a short while.

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*