
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

3 November 2010

We can spend some time in meditation. Meditation is primarily a technique of accustoming our mind with a virtuous object. The technical explanation of meditation is familiarising one's mind with the virtuous object. In plainer language it means familiarising ourselves with good conduct, good behaviour and good manners and so forth in our life.

It is worthwhile to consider the great benefit we derive when we are in a peaceful state of mind. This is something that we may not notice casually but if we consider it we will find it is really to our advantage to be in a peaceful state of mind. It will be a great benefit for our well-being to be in a peaceful state of mind. It is also worthwhile for us to investigate the positive potential we have within us. This positive potential may not be obvious but when we look within ourselves we can find that there is definitely a positive potential within us.

When we lose sight of the positive potential within us, particularly the positive attitudes within us, it is very easy for it to be replaced with a negative or agitated state of mind. When we fall into that state where our attitudes are a little tainted we are prone to mishaps or difficulties arising in one's immediate situation. We might have noticed for ourselves that there are times when we feel a little bit on edge. When we are not feeling settled and feeling a bit on edge, it seems that everything happens at once. It seems many things are happening at the same time and we are not able to cope with that. That is because we have not been mindful of maintaining a positive attitude within us. When our mind is in an unsettled state, in Tibetan it is called the wind energy arising. This means we get on edge and are very prone to becoming agitated and angry.

When an agitated mind begins to arise, if we allow it to continue it can give rise to turmoil, anxiety and feeling depressed. If, before it escalates to that point, we notice that our mind is little bit on edge and unsettled we can utilise meditation practice to make ourselves calm again. It is at that point before the situation escalates, that meditation practice can be very effective. If we begin to apply the meditation technique from the onset then that is when meditation will be useful and help us to maintain our calmness.

If we don't take measures to calm our mind down but allow the agitated mind to carry forward that is how a lot of worries and anxiety arise. It seems one can reach a state where one feels that one has lost one's sense of direction and is altogether unsettled. This sort of mind is preoccupied with many different thoughts and ideas but

is never really certain about what it is that one needs to accomplish.

Along with that, it also seems that our mind remains under restriction. It seems that whatever we attempt we have a fatalistic view that nothing will work out. This is because we have too many thoughts and we don't trust our own speculations and our own daydreaming state of mind. Our mind becomes very restricted and we end up feeling quite hopeless and lose self-esteem, confidence and so forth. These are states of mind that none of us wish for. It is not a pleasant state to be in.

If one has experienced that state where one's mind becomes totally carried away with distractions that causes us disturbances, then it is worthwhile for us to consider applying a technique that does not allow our mind to lapse into that state again. Meditation is a technique where we withdraw our mind from all forms of distractions, different meaningless thoughts and ideas and so forth. We completely withdraw from all of that and choose an appropriate object to focus on.

It is mentioned in the teachings that one can choose any virtuous or neutral object but it is best not to have an object that would cause more agitation or disturbance to arise in the mind. We call that an object of delusion and it would not be appropriate. However, an object that causes the mind to settle down is appropriate. The practice of meditation that we adopt here is to use our own breath, which is a neutral object. So we focus on our breath. The way to do that is to first of be mindful of withdrawing all our attention from all other forms of distractions and completely withdrawing the mind and settling it on the object of our meditation. By doing this we would notice from our own experience that the mind does settle down. We immediately feel the positive effect of the mind becoming calm and tranquil. So there is definitely a benefit when we apply this technique appropriately.

When we apply this meditation technique appropriately and make the attempt to focus on the meditation object, many people feel that the mind naturally becomes very tranquil and calm. Some have confided in me that there is a feeling of almost wonder when it occurs for the first time. One can be taken by surprise and astonished that the mind can reach such a very tranquil and calm state. This is experience that one can gain from the practice of meditation.

When one experiences that it is a good sign. That is the positive effect of meditation. Now, having experienced that, if one however becomes a little complacent and does not continue with one's practice of meditation, then that positive feeling, that good tranquil state of mind, will slowly begin to fade away and one may wonder why one is not experiencing that again. The initial experience is like a taste of what is to come on a long-term basis if one applies the technique regularly. It takes regular practice to achieve a long-lasting positive effect. Nevertheless, that initial experience that we gain from the meditation can serve as an inspiration. It is a positive sign that it is possible to achieve a calm and tranquil state of mind in a very natural way. Because meditation is a natural mental technique its positive effects are genuine, which can only benefit one.

As we apply the technique regularly our mind will start to become clearer and brighter. We will have a natural clarity and brightness in our mind. This, in turn, has a positive effect on increasing our intelligence; particularly that which is called analytical wisdom. Analytical wisdom is a particular type of intelligence that is able to distinguish which attitudes, thoughts and states of mind are useful and which are harmful. The function of analytical wisdom is to be able to distinguish this clearly, and thus adopt the positive states of mind and discard the negative states of mind. Further enhancing that analytical wisdom is the ultimate protection for all the positive and goodness within oneself.

We have lots of positive qualities such as kindness, genuine concern for others and love for others. These are positive qualities that we all naturally possess. These are positive states of mind and our genuine kindness, love and concern for others naturally brings about positive behaviour on the physical level. We have a pleasant look and physical gestures as well as pleasant speech when dealing with others. This allows us to relate to others on all three levels. The positive state of mind induces positive behaviour and speech. It is good for us to recognise that these qualities are enhanced through the practice of the meditation.

The further positive advantage of having a clear and bright state of mind is that it induces a genuinely joyful and happy state of mind. The benefit of maintaining a happy and joyous state of mind is that one would naturally have a positive effect upon others. Whoever we associate with will naturally feel at ease around us and would have a natural tendency to want to be around us. This is how we can gain genuine, good companions through maintaining a happy and joyous state of mind.

We can see for ourselves what the opposite of this would be. When our mind is affected with negative attitudes our physical gestures, our whole mannerism is affected in a negative way and it is then that we may say things that are inappropriate or act in ways that are inappropriate and disagree with others. When we act and behave in certain ways others will naturally shy away from us and wouldn't want to be near us. That is natural. No one wants to be around someone who is behaving and acting in an inappropriate way.

Furthermore, we would notice that if our mind is a little depressed we have a natural inclination to not want to talk to others. If we do talk with others we find that we have a natural tendency to say things that are little bit inappropriate or not very pleasant. We can definitely see how our state of mind influences our speech and behaviour and how that affects our relationships with others.

The main point is that it is really worthwhile for us to understand and acknowledge that without protecting our positive state of mind, particularly a joyous and happy state of mind, we cannot possibly maintain good relations and companionship with those that we associate with. We all want companions and like to associate with others. Many of us actually live with others. Therefore it is really worthwhile that we contribute to the well-being and harmony of those we associate with, and that this is done

by maintaining a joyous and happy state of mind ourselves. This is the direct relationship between the practice of meditation and our own state of mind.

Analysing and investigating how our own state of being affects us and others around us is important on all three levels, i.e. mentally, verbally and physically. What kinds of thoughts are affecting us? When our thoughts are negative how does it affect our mind? How does that affect others around us? When we engage in physical behaviour, what kind of physical behaviour causes harm to us and the others around us? What kind of speech affects us and others in a negative way?

When one analyses in this way it becomes very clear how our state of being on all three levels, body, speech and mind, has a direct affect upon oneself and others. This does not naturally become apparent to us if we don't actually pay attention and spend the time analysing and checking ourselves. We need to spend a bit of effort and time in analysing in this way so that it becomes clear to us. Then, when we notice that our minds are affected negatively, we can do something about it. We can change that state of our mind. Likewise we can do something to change our behaviour on a physical and verbal level to become more positive. That definitely has an effect in our life. Our manners, our thoughts and our speech definitely have an effect on our whole being. This is something that I personally have definitely found to be true. It is up to you to find out whether this applies to you as well.

I really do take measures on a personal level to investigate and check my own state of being. When I notice that I have a positive state of mind and interact with others in a positive way, I congratulate myself and tell myself, 'Oh, Geshe Doga, you are doing well'. But as soon as I notice that I start to have a negative state of mind and negative attitudes then I caution myself. I say to myself, 'Geshe Doga, be careful, there seems to be tendency for a negative thought to arise here'. I really try to be my own judge and my own teacher in that way.

As I have experienced the benefit of doing this self-analysis myself I would encourage you to also try it. It is something that needs to be done on a consistent basis. If one keeps a constant vigilance over oneself and analyses within one's being it can serve as an ultimate protection for oneself. Being one's own guide or protector means effectively analysing oneself and thus avoiding being influenced by negative states of mind. When, over time, we can maintain a positive outlook in our life, a positive state of mind, positive behaviour, and positive speech in relation to others, we can be assured we will live a more constructive and positive life. That is something that can definitely come about.

We can now actually take some time to apply the meditation technique. First of all let us adopt an upright but comfortable and relaxed posture. We need to have a comfortable posture in order to have the right state of mind. Having adopted the appropriate physical posture, we need to consider the fact that having a relaxed physical posture is not sufficient if our mind is not also in a relaxed state. In order to apply the meditation technique effectively we need to be mindful of our state of mind. For the duration of meditation we make this

commitment, 'I will not allow my mind to be influenced by the distractions'. This means any form of distraction such as thoughts, memories, speculations or ideas. We try to temporarily put all of that aside and bring our focus inwards. This means that we completely let go of all other thoughts and ideas and just bring our mind's focus completely inwards.

Having brought our focus inward, we choose the breath to focus upon. We then maintain our focus on the breath. Having brought our full attention and focus to the breath itself, we try for the next few minutes to maintain our focus on the breath itself without any distraction taking place. That is how we will engage in meditation. (*Pause for meditation.*)

It would be really useful and beneficial if one could regularly apply what we have attempted in our short session of meditation now to one's daily life. The main thing to consider in the practice of meditation is to have a relaxed state of mind. That is, of course, based upon having a relaxed body first. If one didn't relax the body one would not be able to relax the mind. But just having a relaxed body is not sufficient if our mind is not relaxed. We may notice that when our body and mind are relaxed and focused that we experience a positive effect from meditation. Whereas when the body is relaxed but the mind is tense we might start feeling aches and a little stressed. If we feel a little bit stressed physically and feel tension within our body it is a sign that we have not paid attention to having a relaxed state of mind. If our mind feels agitation, that affects the body as well.

The reason the state of mind affects the body is because the constitution of the body is said to be based on the four elements, earth, water, fire and wind. Our mind has a definite influence over the four elements within our body. When the mind is agitated it affects the elements within the body and also disturbs the subtle energy. The elements can be understood on a gross level, but on a subtler level it is the energy of the four elements that is affected by the state of mind. When the energies within oneself are disturbed the body suffers from that. That is the relationship between the body and mind.

I have heard others also claim that a happy mind is really important for good, sound health. The claim that a happy mind is really the best thing for one's physical health was made by someone that I know, whose grandmother is in Switzerland. When the story was related to me she was about 95 and still doing very well—very robust and in good health. My friend told me that his grandmother claimed that she maintains a happy, joyous mind and that is what contributes to her having good health. This is not something related by someone who meditates a lot, so just the fact of having a happy and joyous mind definitely seems to contribute to one's health. That is, of course, something from her own experience. Apparently the only difficulty she had was in bending down to pick things up, so she had a stick with a hook that can grab things. But except for that disability she was very good in every other way. She was in very sound health and able to walk about and interact with people and so forth. She had often claimed that her good sound health was due to her happy state of mind.

Then there are others who have also related to me that they have gained a happy state of mind from meditation. There are many accounts of that as well but what I related earlier is a very practical approach. It doesn't have any religious connotation to it. We might also have noticed that people who are not really happy and quite depressed seem to age quicker. We need consider that if we want to have a youthful and radiant appearance we need to maintain a happy and joyous state of mind. That will prevent ageing (*Geshe-la chuckles*) When we consider what we really want and are striving for, it is a state of happiness. A happy state of mind is what we are really striving for.

The reason I spend quite a bit of time explaining these practical approaches to life, and maintaining one's state of mind and attitude and so forth, is because it could benefit you. It does seem to take up quite a bit of time in my session and at the end of my explanation it seems we don't have much time to cover the subject matter from the text. But it is with an intention that it would serve as a practical benefit for those who are here that I spend time on this. Indeed others have acknowledged and mentioned that it does benefit them. To give a particular example, the previous translator, Tenzin Fedor, who is a good monk, confided in me that he used to have a problem with a little bit of depression and had difficult times controlling his mind. However in interpreting and hearing this advice on regular basis, it actually had benefited him. Before he left he thanked me and said, 'I really thank you Geshe-la for all of that advice. It has definitely benefited me and helped to reduce the anxiety and depression in my mind'. So, this is just one account.

In another incident, another western monk, who I didn't know and had not associated with before, came up to me when we were in the holy site of Bodhgaya in India and said, 'I have heard that you spend a lot of time giving practical advice to people. When I heard about it I felt very appreciative. It is really good that you are conducting teachings in that manner and giving practical advice to people. Even though I don't know you, I really want to express my appreciation for that approach.'

So there has been a positive response to the time that I spend sharing this advice. I continue it with the hope that it does continue to benefit people.

Some people may wonder why I spend time giving advice and talking on other matters while leaving aside the subject material. Maybe some older students might wonder why is Geshe-la doing that. Some may feel that maybe Geshe-la is bit insane to talk about so many things besides the actual subject matter. But I don't think that I am insane! (*Laughter*) I think there is some benefit here.

We have some more advanced students in the study group on a Tuesday evening. Then I spend quite a bit of time and teach the subject material in quite a bit of depth. Those students seem to appreciate that as they have come to a point of embracing the philosophy and the teachings of the Buddha. So they can actually relate to the teaching. Some people who come to that session have confided in me that even though they don't understand everything from the subject matter, as sometimes it is quite profound and a little bit beyond their capacity to understand,

nevertheless they come to the teachings and feel very good. It makes them feel very relaxed and joyful and serves a great purpose for them. Thus when it is appropriate, I do present the material quite in depth as well. For those who may not immediately or readily appreciate in-depth philosophical teachings from the text, there is not much point in spending much time on that.

This is, of course, based on some experiences in my life. Having gone through some difficulties and hardships in the early part of my life I have benefited from trying to apply the practical approaches of the Buddha's teachings and advice. From my own experience I know that maintaining certain attitudes, certain ways of thinking, certain states of mind, does have a positive effect upon oneself. Based on these personal experiences I can share some of these things that I have learned myself. So it is with that understanding that I share experiences and conduct the teachings in the way that I do.

The main thing that I pay attention to is, when I share the advice with you, is that it is done in light of seeing all of you as genuine friends and companions. Thus it is with an attitude of wishing to help a friend and companion. It is in that light that I share the advice and teachings with you. Even though, conventionally I am sitting on a throne, personally I don't maintain an attitude of being higher than you. In my mind I am sitting below and have you up higher than me, and consider you as being of primal importance. So it is with that intention and motivation that I conduct the teachings like a good companion and friend.

Before we conclude for the evening it would be good to spend a few more minutes in meditation. This time the object of our focus will be the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. As we hear the sound of the mantra we try to maintain our focus just on the sound itself. As the recitation comes to a stop we try to maintain one's focus on the residue of the sound and hold it within one's mind. By not focusing on anything else and maintaining one's focus on the residual sound this becomes an actual meditation itself.

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*