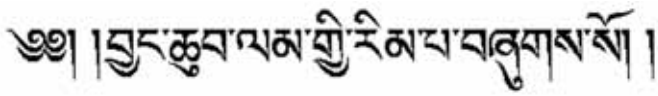

The Condensed Lam Rim



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

20 July 2011

As usual we can spend some time in meditation. So for that purpose we adopt a relaxed posture and generate a positive intention. It will be beneficial when we mutually develop a positive motivation. There is definitely a positive effect when a good intention or motivation is developed from your side as well as from my side.

There is a practical benefit in having a positive intention for doing something, such as listening to a teaching. When the teacher has a positive motivation then that motivation ensures that what is being presented is in the best interests of those who are receiving it. Likewise when those who are listening to the teaching generate a positive motivation, it makes one really receptive to what is being taught, which helps to bring about a real transformation to the mind.

As I regularly emphasise, when we see the benefit of what we learn here as a result of having good motivation on both the teacher's side and the listener's side, we will realise that it is something that we need to adopt in our everyday life; particularly when we communicate with others. If there is a good intention on both sides, then whenever we engage with one another, it definitely has a positive effect.

To explain this further, if, for example, resolving a conflict between individuals or communities is done with a positive intention on both sides, then that will enable the use of intelligence and wisdom in resolving that conflict. On the other hand, the lack of a positive motivation or intention, or even worse, adopting a mischievous intention, will obscure one's intelligence and wisdom. Then the outcome will not be positive, because one's intelligence or wisdom have not been properly utilised.

In fact there can never be a good outcome if you have not been able to utilise your intelligence in trying to resolve a problem in positive way. In other words, having a positive intention will allow the mind to be calm, tranquil and sensible, which will allow one to be able to use one's intelligence or wisdom to contribute to resolving that conflict in a meaningful way. Generating a positive intention or motivation brings about a positive outcome in whatever one does.

We need to recognise that a positive motivation or intention does not come about naturally, which means that we need to actually train our mind in familiarising with a positive motivation. We are much more acquainted with not having a very clear intention or motivation and, even worse, devious intentions arise quite naturally, so we don't have to train our mind to do

that! Having a positive intention requires some effort to overcome our familiarity with negative intentions. Therefore we need to realise that it is definitely worthwhile to train our mind to generate positive intentions.

When we analyse where most of our problems come from, we will begin to see that they come from negative states of mind. If we were to honestly analyse our situation, external factors are only minor contributing factor; the main creator of problems actually lies within our own mind. External factors may trigger a problem but it is the negative states of mind that compound the problem.

When we begin to see that the main source of our problems lie in the lack of a positive state of mind, we will be able to resolve to devote some energy and effort into actually training our mind, familiarising it with more positive attitudes and intentions.

At this point we may ask how to go about training our mind. Is there a technique that trains the mind to adopt positive intentions. This is where meditation practice comes in. As I mention regularly, meditation is none other than a technique of familiarising ourselves with positive states of mind. It is the optimum way of training the mind to adopt a positive state of mind as opposed to negative ones.

If we just left our mind in its normal state, then because of our familiarity with negative states of mind, all sorts of neurotic fears and paranoia seem to arise quite naturally. It is because it doesn't seem to come about naturally that we need to pay particular attention to familiarising ourselves with a positive frame of mind. Even when we do have a positive state of mind it doesn't seem to remain for too long.

We don't need much effort to have a negative state of mind; not only does it occur naturally, but it is very easy for it to become more and more exaggerated. The Buddha said that the more we are familiar with something the harder it is to overcome. He used the example of sleep: the more someone sleeps and focuses on that, the more they will never be satisfied with how much sleep they get. They sleep more and more, and the habit is hard to overcome. Then trying to get up early is really difficult for them.

Then there is attachment and desire for certain things. When we have strong attachment to something, then the more we are attached to it, the more we are inclined to be obsessed with it and then it is very, very difficult to overcome that obsession. Another example is alcohol. There are those who indulge in alcohol to the point where they become really dependent on it. Those who have had that experience would know that it is very difficult to overcome that addiction.

There are quite a few examples of how due to familiarity, one gets into a bad habit that is very difficult to overcome. Good habits are hard to maintain, and the way to develop and maintain a positive mind is to familiarise ourselves with it again and again. Therefore it is worthwhile to adopt the practice of meditation, which is a technique to familiarise with a positive state of mind.

In Buddhism the term used to describe a whole range of negative states of mind is delusion. The more one is familiar with the delusions or mental afflictions, the stronger and stronger they become. A good example of an affliction or delusion that becomes stronger in this way is anger. The more we give into harbouring anger, the more intense it becomes. If we find ourselves becoming angry with insignificant things, then that is because of our familiarity with anger. It has reached such a level of intensity that even minor things are uncomfortable, causing one to become upset and angry very easily.

I have given many examples of such incidents in the past, so I need not go into them again. Everyone will have their own examples, so the question here is why do we get upset with small insignificant things? That is a valid question to ask. According to Buddhist psychology it is due to nothing else but our familiarity with it, that we give into anger, and allow it to dominate us.

When we check whether we would prefer an angry state of mind or a mind that is free from anger; we will understand that a state of non-anger is a much more preferable state to be in. A state of non-anger is a much calmer and more relaxed state of mind, while an angry state of mind is a very uncomfortable state of agitation. So it is clear that if we had to choose between the two, no one would willingly choose an angry state of mind, because it is such an uncomfortable state to be in. On the other hand when we realise that being free from anger is a much more comfortable and calm state of mind, we will opt for that

Attachment is a different issue. If I were to ask you to choose between attachment and a mind free of attachment, many of you might choose a mind of attachment. That is because it is harder for us to recognise the ill effects of attachment as we associate attachment with the pleasure that we derive from an object of attachment. So we might find it more difficult to accept that the mind of attachment is an uncomfortable, disturbed state of mind. But if we take a step back and really look into how attachment works, and how it actually affects the mind, we will be able to see how attachment is a negative state of mind.

If I had to make a choice, I would choose a mind of non-attachment, because of the ill effects that the mind of attachment produces. When we look at the long term effect of how attachment works when we give in to it, we will slowly begin to notice that rather than creating a calm mind, attachment produces a lot of agitation and disturbance. A mind of non-attachment, on the other hand, is much calmer and peaceful; that is because it is free from complications and worries. It has physical as well as mental benefits.

The main point is that we all have the capacity to detect our own state of mind. The states that cause agitation and unease are called negative states of mind, because of the effects are uncomfortable. Positive states of mind are so named because of their positive effects. Being familiar with positive states of mind such as compassion and love can definitely overcome negative states of mind such as anger. We all have the ability to distinguish between

positive and negative states of mind, so it is just a matter of making the right choice.

Having shared something of the practical benefits of engaging in meditation, we can now take the opportunity to actually engage in meditation practice. If we apply the meditation technique in an appropriate way then the positive effect is that we will feel relaxed both physically as well as mentally. As there is a dual benefit of physical and mental relaxation we can see how worthwhile it is to actually apply the meditation technique.

As mentioned previously, meditation means keeping the mind focused on a virtuous object, an object that does not cause afflictions to arise. So it entails both the choice of a virtuous object, and maintaining a focus on that object through mindfulness.

The object we use for our meditation practice here is our own breath. In order to bring our full focus onto the breath we need to commit ourselves to first of all withdraw from all other forms of distractions, including thoughts and ideas and all sorts of external distractions. Then bring your full attention and focus onto your own natural breathing. Having resolved to keeping our attention and mindfulness on the breath itself, we will spend the next few minutes just focusing on that.

[pause for meditation]

Before we proceed, is there is any question you would like to ask. If you have a question, please raise your hand.

Question: I'm going through something at the moment that is quite stressful. It's a negative state of mind where I feel that I have reached my limits. I go to bed and when I wake up, there it is again, and I feel I am in the grip of something. So the idea of familiarity is really interesting. I don't feel that I'm cultivating it any more but its there despite what I do. Any advice would be really good.

Answer: It is worthwhile to consider the object or incident that is causing this mental disturbance. Even though it may reach a point where it is uncontrollable, if one actually starts to look within, one may be able to detect that it is associated with some memory, and that there is a correlation between the object, whatever it is, and the negative state of mind that follows uncontrollably.

Having detected what causes that negative state of mind to rise, it is be worthwhile to try to divert one's attention from that object, and not completely give in to it. The only way that the meditation technique will have an effect on one's mind, even temporarily, would be when one completely withdraws from all objects of distraction that cause distress. Then when one focuses on object 100%, the effect of meditation will become apparent.

One applies the meditation technique to its full extent, meaning totally focusing on the virtuous object of focus, even just for five minutes, without being pulled in the direction of the negative states of mind and so forth. When one is able to do that then the real message is that unlike our earlier thoughts, one has actually proven to oneself that one does have control over the mind, even if only for a few minutes. This will counter the earlier assumption that one doesn't have any control. Then it is a matter of slowly, slowly, prolonging that control over one's own mind, in a gradual process.

At the happiness conference that we attended recently in Brisbane with His Holiness the Dalai Lama, there were discussion panels sharing techniques that seem to work best for developing a calm state of mind and temporarily forgetting about all one's worries. One panel member, who was apparently a psychologist, mentioned that he finds cooking is one of the best methods for forgetting about everything else. This person is quite well known for his work in taking care of troubled youths, and he recently received an award for this work. I recall that His Holiness mentioned that this technique worked because he had temporarily withdrawn from all other forms of distraction, focusing just on the cooking. This is an example of how one can divert one's attention from that what is causing one's distress. It does actually help.

Question: I read in a Dharma book that the enlightened aspect of anger is called mirror-like wisdom, in which the two are like the opposite sides of the same coin. So it was my understanding that someone with intense anger is more likely to transform it to become the mirror-like wisdom. Is that a correct understanding?

Answer: When you read something in a book there is always room for misinterpretation. The misinterpretation that can arise from such a description is that seemingly there is some value in anger. There is, of course, a fine line here in that anger is a state of mind that does have an ultimate essence of clarity. It is that clarity within an angry state of mind that some traditions explain becomes the Mirror-like wisdom; however it is not anger itself that becomes the enlightened mind. Without that understanding it may seem that anger is the other side of coin of an enlightened state of mind of clear wisdom, which is a misunderstanding.

One needs to understand what mirror-like wisdom actually connotes, which is that it is an enlightened state of mind. The element of clarity in an angry state of mind is not a deluded state of mind, and so there is a doubt as to whether that clarity ends up becoming an enlightened state of mind. Some say that that it does not, but other schools say, that the clarity aspect of anger does go on to becoming an enlightened state of mind. So there is some doubt there. However there is no Buddhist tradition that would accept anger itself becoming an enlightened state of mind.

To clarify further, anger being state of mind, it has an element of clarity and luminosity. As explained in the definition of mind, the mind is formless and shapeless, with mere luminosity and clarity. So because anger is a state of mind it has an aspect of being clear and luminous, and if that is the case then doubt arises as is whether that actually goes on to an enlightened state of mind.

However, even those who use that interpretation would definitely say that anger itself does not on to an enlightened state of mind. Whatever the interpretation, all Buddhist schools of thought unanimously agree that anger must be abandoned. This means one has to completely remove all traces of anger from the mind. Anger is to be abandoned, and not adopted. All schools of Buddhism accept that as a fact.

Anger is just one element of a deluded mind. Likewise no Buddhist school of thought accepts delusion as

something to be adopted. All say that delusions have to be abandoned. While one has to abandon all delusions, the question is really whether that luminosity and clarity of the deluded mind goes to enlightenment.

Question: My understanding was not so much that anger goes on to becoming an enlightened mind, than about anger transforming into the mirror-like wisdom.

Answer: The word 'transform' may be ambiguous, but it is definitely true that when one gets rid of anger, one is left with a pure state of mind. When all delusions are abandoned then what remains is a pure state of mind, which is an enlightened state of mind. So in that context there is no contradiction there. In Buddhism the technical term for that pure state of mind that is left after having abandoned a particular delusion is called a 'cessation'. When there is a cessation of a particular state of mind, then it is a state of mind where that negativity never occurs again.

To avoid any misinterpretation of how you read what is presented, the real intention is that when someone has lot of anger, then rather than saying 'You are bad because you have lots of anger and attachment', it is more skilful to allow the person to say, 'Well, I do have anger and attachment. I recognise it and I see it'. When you recognise anger for what it really is, and accept it as being a negative state of mind that it is quite harmful, and certainly not useful, then that recognition of anger can become an impetus to transform or overcome anger.

It would be a misinterpretation of that passage to see it as a validation of anger and attachment. The more skilful way would be to work with it as a way to recognise one's anger and attachment for what it is, and when one fully understands that anger and attachment are negative states, then there is an impetus to abandon them both.

There are those who may feel that they cannot possibly overcome anger and attachment. A presentation like this helps these people, as it gives them some space in their mind.

Question: His Holiness said that watching TV makes the mind dull, but sometimes I feel that without TV I couldn't survive.

Answer: It is possible to live without TV. there are many places where people don't have any TV but they live very happily. Deciding that you cannot survive without TV just goes to show how watching TV has dulled the mind!

If you really believe that without a TV your life would be empty and without meaning, then wherever you go there would always have to be a TV. Of course they do attempt to do that in aeroplanes, but they would have to extend that to the trains, and indeed everywhere you go. Believing that it is impossible to go somewhere where there is no TV because you think you wouldn't be happy is how TV causes dullness.

This is yet another example of how we conjure up a lot of dull states of mind, where we are convinced that if we are deprived of the things that make us happy, then we will be totally unhappy. Dulling our mind to that extent causes us lot of problems and unnecessary anxiety.

Question: Would it be better if we stopped watching altogether?

There are apparently some who claim if you watch too much TV as a child it makes your eyes smaller. Of course if I were to say it's better not to watch TV then you might have resolve that you have to go where there is no TV around. Has it become clear now how TV makes the mind dull?

As a further example of how TV dulls the mind take two children, one spends most of their time watching TV, while the other one limits their TV watching and spends more time doing their homework and their study. When they go back to school, which one would be brighter? Which one would be better able to understand more? It would clearly be the one who has given the time to do the homework, and who has taken initiative to do more study. The one who has spent all their time watching TV will have a duller mind, because they will not have the knowledge of the subject that they were supposed to have studied.

I have also heard that those who spend lot of time watching TV or playing games have great difficulty in turning their mind to other things. Because they are constantly bombarded what they see on TV and in the games, when they try to your study, or even close their eyes, those images keep popping up in their mind again and again. They don't seem to have control over those images which then become a distraction.

We can go further to more subtle levels. When we watch TV we are convinced that we seeing something that is really happening, which of course is not the case. We become totally engrossed and involved, and our emotions are heightened, when in fact it is just colours and shapes on the screen. And some actually believe that they can do what they have seen on TV. Apparently there was a show which showed a lot of youngsters jumping around, and some of those watching that thought, 'oh, I can do that' and started trying to copy what they had seen. It was apparently a legal issue—maybe it shouldn't have been shown to under-age children, because they think that they could do the same thing. Television makes the mind dull by making it believe that the impossible is possible.

Most of the shows on TV, whether movies or serials or something based on reality are just conjured up. But when we watch them we are totally convinced that what we see is really happening. There are those who get sucked-in to the point where they spend a lot of time focusing on what they have seen. I have been told if they start thinking that what they are seeing is not real, then they can't enjoy it. So they have to convince themselves that it is really happening, and then they enjoy the show much more.

Someone once told me that there some shows, such as historical series, which may have some basis in historical fact, but in other cases it might just be fictional drama. By believing in what is happening on the screen and become completely engrossed with it, they can focus on it over a long period of time, and find it really enjoyable. But as soon as they think, 'Oh, it is not real' they actually lose interest. Even young children can be so engrossed in watching TV that when someone speaks to them they say,

'Don't speak to me because I am watching the TV'. I think that speaks for itself!

If you do decide that you can't be without TV then you will always have to walk with a TV in your pocket! I don't mean to put you down; your question was in fact a very good one. It made everyone laugh and we all enjoyed having fun with it.

We will conclude for the evening with another meditation. This time the object of our meditation will be the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. As the mantra is recited try to keep our full attention and focus on the sound of the mantra itself. As the recitation subsides, try to maintain that focus for a few moments before we come out of the meditation. This is an appropriate meditation practice.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed by Su Lan Foo
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version
© Tara Institute*