
The Condensed Lam Rim

༄༅། །བྱང་ཆུབ་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བཞུགས་སོ། །

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

3 August 2011

As usual we will spend some time in meditation. To meditate we sit in a comfortable, relaxed posture. It is also important to have a clear and bright state of mind. If we can adopt a position where we are physically and mentally relaxed, then that would be really worthwhile.

While we might agree that a physically and mentally relaxed state would be wondrous and good for us we may find however that it does not come about quite naturally and easily. Instead we may find that while we might be physically relaxed our mind is constantly busy and completely distracted—quite opposite of being settled, relaxed and calm. That is what we normally find in our situation. This seems to be something that we all share quite commonly. Regardless of our status and situation, whether we are poor or rich, young or old, we all have a lot of mental restlessness, angst and experience some anguish.

So what we find from our own experience is that while it might be relatively easy to feel relaxed physically, it is difficult to have a relaxed and calm state of mind. That is something we will recognise. We will find that our mind is not naturally calm. Therefore, there is no choice but for us to train our mind to become relaxed and calm. We need to make an effort to acquire that.

Acquiring a relaxed, calm and a joyous state of mind is possible. We need to recognise that it is achievable. Feeling calm and relaxed can be a natural state of mind. However, the fact that we do not experience a naturally calm, relaxed, joyful and peaceful state right now means that we haven't made ourselves familiar with that state of mind. However it is something that is possible and will come about with acquaintance and familiarity. Some may feel that there's no real rush. When we are quite young it is okay to be distracted a bit and lead a life of a little bit of distraction. However, what seems to be apparent is that if one becomes acquainted with a distracted state of life in one's younger years then, as one ages and if a lot of complications and problems arise one may not have the adequate means and tools to deal with them. Therefore, at whatever stage one is at now, it is the appropriate time to start training one's mind to acquaint it with those positive states.

If we find ourselves more inclined to be in a distracted state, with a mind that is devoid of tranquillity, calmness and a sense of joy and happiness, then it is appropriate that we could look for the causes of that. Particularly if one is at mature age, we could look into what has led one to be in that state of mind. When we look for the sources in the earlier part of our life, it seems that it is related to one's teenage years, when one was fifteen or sixteen. At

that age one was completely immersed in all sorts of distractions and allowing oneself to completely indulge in frivolous activities, such as being infatuated with girlfriends or boyfriends, music and all sorts of external distractions. If one allowed oneself to be completely influenced by those distractions, then the mind naturally becomes acquainted with that kind of distractions.

Familiarity at that young age becomes a habit in one's life which later in life causes the mind to become naturally distracted and agitated. So when one is in one's fifties or sixties that tendency to indulge in external distractions is still there and very strong. However, physically one is not be able to keep up with those frivolous activities anymore. So in one's later years there might be a lot of anguish in one's mind, when one still believes that external distractions and frivolous activities bring some sort of joy and pleasure, but physically one is not able to cope with all of that. If one has not acquainted oneself with any other means to experience a sense of joy and happiness, then at that point one would experience great anguish.

That is why I emphasise that youngsters, specifically in the teen years, pay attention to their studies rather than being completely influenced and indulging in frivolous activities. On a practical level focussing on one's studies will secure a good job later on. One will have the practical means to be able to maintain a good job and financially it will give one security in relation to one's external conditions. One would no worries in the future.

At the same time I encourage youngsters to maintain a disciplined mind and focus inwards to maintain some level of self-control. With that familiarity at a young age, it becomes quite natural to have a more disciplined and controlled mind which brings about more tranquillity and calmness. Self-discipline is none other than the means to gain some real tranquillity and calmness in one's mind. This is something that it is worthwhile for us to consider.

I must say that I cannot blame those who are engaged in frivolous activities because we are really used to totally believing that external frivolous activities bring us some sense of pleasure. We can get quite immersed in that sort of pleasure and pleasant sensations in relation to sights and sounds, tastes and so forth. These sorts of enjoyments do bring us a certain amount of pleasure, thus we are naturally inclined to spend some time and energy in acquiring those pleasures. However the main thing to consider is whether those kind of pleasures bring about a real sense of contentment, joy and happiness in one's mind or not.

If we don't pay attention to what happiness means, it can be quite ambiguous. So what is 'happiness?' A couple of years ago when His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, participated in the Happiness Conference in Sydney a lady from an aboriginal background, who seemed to be quite well-known in her field of study, confessed, 'I do not know how to define happiness. What is happiness?' She said that she still hadn't found a good definition of what happiness means. Therefore we need to be mindful and not just give in to sensual pleasures. and fall for

sensual pleasures as an actual means of happiness. That would be misleading and misguided.

When a prominent lady in her own field of psychology confesses that she doesn't really know how to define happiness, I would interpret that as being because of not being able to define what the mind is. According to science, that which is referred to 'mind' seems to be none other than the 'brain'. So science looks into the brain to investigate where happiness is experienced and how to induce happiness, but fails to pinpoint which part of the brain experiences happiness. So, the failing to understand who the real experiencer is, which is the mind and not the actual brain, makes happiness seem elusive.

This, of course, is my assumption why there may be confusion about what happiness is. According to our tradition we say that the mind or consciousness is not something that is physical. It is not just the brain but something beyond the physical realm within us, called mind or consciousness, which experiences happiness. The mind is something that does not depend entirely on our physical body. Thus the mind has to be developed through one's own mental activity. That which experiences happiness is the mind. So transforming the mind to experience happiness is to be done mentally. It cannot be done by altering the physical brain.

In Buddhism the method for achieving happiness, is by training the mind itself and acquainting it with positive qualities and attitudes. The technique that allows one to familiarise and acquaint oneself with a positive state of mind is meditation. The technique of meditation is held in high esteem in the Buddhist tradition, because it is one of the ultimate methods for achieving the positive qualities that contribute to a joyous, happy, tranquil and calm mind. I emphasise again and again, regardless of who we are, regardless of whether we are young, middle aged or elderly, all of us equally need to experience happiness. We want to have a happy state of mind and meditation is something that is relevant for all of us regardless of what age we are or what group we belong to. This is why I emphasise again and again the importance and the benefits of meditation.

A positive consequence of engaging in the practice of meditation in one's early life is that there are individuals who are now in their late nineties who have confided in me that they have a happy and joyous state of mind. That is the positive consequence of doing meditation in the earlier part of their life.

The main point that I am emphasising is that in order to derive the benefits of meditation we need to acquaint our mind with the practice of meditation. We need to actually apply that in one's life. Having seen the example of the benefits of meditation in the later part of life, such as the individual in their nineties who confided in me, I have at the opposite end of spectrum had youngsters acknowledge and understand the benefits of meditation. One youngster, about twenty-four or twenty-five years old, confided in me that having engaged in meditation they felt a real difference in their life. Particularly if one has meditated in the morning, the mind seems to be much clearer for the day. Studies seems to be much easier

to comprehend and focus on. In other fields of work, they seem to be able to focus really well.

The practical benefits of meditation, obtaining a clear and focussed mind, is something that is experienced even in the early part of one's life every time one does the actual practice of meditation. The real benefit of meditation is that it serves as a means to generate a clear and bright state of mind and along with that, a more calm, tranquil and joyous mind. The joyous and happy mind is something that I consider the best companion and friend. When one is able to maintain a happy state of mind, it travels with us wherever we go. At any time, at any occasion, it will be an unfailing companion because even without other external companions, we will still be able to maintain a sense of contentment and joy within us. A happy and joyous state of mind assists and helps us at all times. That is why we can consider it our best companion and best friend. A happy state of mind is something that we can all acquire. We all have the means by engaging in the practice of meditation. So, to that extent, I re-emphasise, the significance of meditation.

When we begin to acknowledge and see the benefits of the practice of meditation we need to apply it. We have the right conditions now. We might have busy lives and other things to do but we need to keep in mind that the practice of meditation is something meaningful and useful. So, in between one's busy times, we need to secure a few minutes for the practice of meditation. We can summarise the main point of meditation as a technique that allows us to familiarise ourselves with a positive state of mind.

We can now practice meditation and for that purpose we readjust our physical posture to be relaxed and comfortable. As mentioned previously, what causes the turmoil and angst within us is a completely distracted mind. By recognising the distracted mind is harmful to us, the meditation technique involves completely withdrawing ourselves from all forms of thought, ideas and so forth, and temporarily just bringing our full focus and attention within us.

Withdrawing from all other forms of distraction means that we bring our focus within ourselves. If we don't have something to focus on it would be very difficult to maintain a state of mind with no thoughts, an empty state of mind. Therefore we use an object to anchor our focus and mind. The object that we use is our own breath, focusing on the natural inflow and outflow of our breathing. We maintain our full attention and a one-hundred-percent focus just on the breath itself and try to maintain that for the next few minutes. If we can maintain it for two or three minutes, that would be wondrous. Even if we can maintain that focus for a few moments we would definitely derive a benefit. So, we engage in meditation. (*Pause for meditation*).

It will be highly beneficial if we can apply the meditation technique, just as we have attempted in our short session now, regularly in our daily lives because meditation is a technique to acquaint ourselves with positive states of mind and develop a focus on something positive. We would all agree that having a positive state of mind is really beneficial and useful for us. However that positive

state of mind can only come about through familiarity by maintaining one's focus on it.

We are already quite acquainted with having a mind focussed on negativity. We don't need to pay a lot of attention to negativity. It seems to come naturally. In fact there are those who focus on an aspect of negativity for years on end. We can take one example, such as an object of attachment. Even after many years have gone by, an individual can still be obsessed by an object of attachment. Being obsessed with an object of attachment is none other than being focussed on the object of attachment. Being focussed on a non-virtuous object, such as an object of attachment, is something that doesn't need much effort. It seems that even for years on end, we are still able to maintain that focus, but we find that it is difficult to maintain focus on a positive object for even a short time.

Now if we fail to focus on a particular object that would benefit us, how can we achieve the results of engaging in whatever we try to achieve? Even in worldly activities, such as one's studies or any field of work, we need to have a focused mind. Without a focussed mind there's no way to achieve a good result from what we are doing, let alone spiritual practice. Even in worldly activities it is very clear that we need to have a focussed mind.

More importantly this is also the case for developing our state of mind. What is called spirituality basically means to have a positive state of mind. In order to increase a positive attitude and a positive state of mind, we need to have a focussed mind. There's no question about that. Therefore the meditation technique is again the best technique. There are those who lament that even after long periods of meditation, they don't see any improvements in their mind. Here we need to understand that meditation doesn't mean being able to sit rigidly and seemingly still for a long period of time. That's not what meditation is. Meditation is a state of mind, having and maintaining a focus in one's mind. That is what meditation really is. Based on the physical aspects of sitting, some may think that they have achieved and made some progress in meditation. Even in the beginning they might not have been able to sit rigidly for much longer than five minutes without fidgeting. After a certain period of time if they are able to maintain the physical posture for an hour they might think, 'Oh, I have really improved in meditation practice because I can sit without moving or fidgeting for about an hour'. But that, in itself, is not really a great achievement if the mind is still distracted. The mind is not focussed if one is not able to maintain a single-pointed focus in one's mind. Even with the physical aspect of sitting quietly the mind can still be in turmoil and still active. So we really need to understand what meditation actually implies. It is the focussed state of mind. Achieving a focussed state of mind is what meditation is.

There is a story about a traveller who wanted to see a particular well-known master. When he went to the master's dwelling he was informed by the tenant, 'Oh, you cannot see the master right now because he is having his meditation session'. The traveller was not a simple fellow, rather someone who had developed a level of

clairvoyant achievement himself. The traveller said, 'The master is not in meditation. He is down roaming about in the town'. When the lama was informed about this remark he acknowledged this saying, 'Actually I was a little bit distracted in my meditation at a certain point. So, he would have detected that'.

The important point to note about the meditation technique, is that from the very outset one needs to ensure that one has a focussed mind and to maintain that. Even if it is for just two or three minutes that is far more worthwhile than having five, ten minutes, even an hour, of a seeming meditation session where one's mind is constantly drifting back and forth. If it is seemingly focused on the object, but actually drifting in and out, then that is not really a healthy approach to developing concentration. If, from the very outset, one does not ensure that one's mind maintain it's focus, even for a short few moments, and one falls into the habit of seemingly being focussed, then finding oneself distracted and again bringing back one's mind then that, in itself, becomes a habit. If we become familiar with a state of mind that is habitually going out and becoming distracted, then we will not be able to attain actual concentration. Therefore it is said that it is very important to maintain, even for a few moments, a real focussed mind to develop concentration.

It seems like we have used most of the time for this session this evening. Before we end the session for the evening, we could again adopt the meditation technique. This time the object of our focus will be the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. While we adopt the appropriate relaxed and upright physical posture, again ensuring that our mind is in a focussed, clear and bright state, we focus on the sound. After the recitation subsides and the sound stops, try to maintain that focus as if we are not focussing on a particular object but just a vacuity in one's mind. It seems like it might be relatively easier for us to adopt that vacuity. Sometimes adopting this state of mind of a void is easier and people seem to like that approach. Of course that is not an end in itself, but temporarily leaving the mind free of all thoughts may also be useful as part of the meditation technique. So we will adopt that.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed by Ai Chin Khor
Edit 1 by John Burch
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version
© Tara Institute*