
The Condensed Lam Rim

༄༅། །བྱང་ཆུབ་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བཞུགས་སྒྲོལ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

31 August 2011

As usual we can spend some time for meditation. For that purpose we try to sit in a comfortable, relaxed posture. The physical posture should be one which, when seen, makes others feel joyful. To give an example, it can be like the posture and the gestures of Buddha Shakyamuni. There are many people, not necessarily Buddhists, who mention that on seeing the image of Buddha Shakyamuni they feel some sense of peace and joy in their mind. Similarly the physical posture and gestures that we adopt can inspire others.

While adopting the appropriate physical posture, we need to recollect the purpose of engaging in a meditation practice, which is to protect the mind and imbue it with gentleness and calmness. The meditation practice serves as a training of the mind by acquainting it with positive attitudes. A kind and gentle state of mind with a positive attitude is something that is most meaningful and useful for oneself and others. That state of mind comes about through familiarity, which is why we need to adopt that practice. When we consider the need for having positive attitudes within ourselves, we can clearly see that a positive mind initiates positive physical gestures and speech. When we secure positive states of mind within oneself that will naturally influence pleasant physical gestures, such as relating to others with a nice smile, a happy face. And when we talk with others, naturally the speech will be pleasant. Appropriate good gestures as well as pleasant and nice speech will naturally make others feel close to you and you will gain companionship. Even in a practical sense we can see that positive states of mind naturally draw others closer to us.

Whatever way we look at it appropriate physical behaviour and speech is really essential for our own wellbeing. It is really our behaviour that determines whether we have a good relationship and communications with others or not. Acknowledging that, we need to really contemplate on how the good physical and verbal gestures are related to having positive attitudes in our mind.

The relevance of securing positiveness at all levels of our being—body, speech and mind—is something we must pay attention to. We need to acknowledge that it is the determining factor for our wellbeing. The relationship between the state of our mind and our body and speech, determines the type of experience we have; if it is wellbeing or unease. We need to pay attention to this relationship within ourselves so that we can secure the best for our life.

When we further relate to the importance of our body, speech and mind, we can recognise the great potential we

have within us to benefit ourselves and others. We see that it is true that positiveness on these three levels allow us to develop wisdom. It is with wisdom that we find the appropriate means for benefiting ourselves and others. It is also a fact that if we don't pay attention to securing the positive states of body, speech and mind and we are influenced by negativities and the delusions, then it can be harmful to ourselves and others. When we can see the relationship between a positive state of mind and a positive body and speech as a means to increase our great potential, then we recognise the need to protect this positive mind and not allow it to decrease as any decrease in the positive states would be a great loss.

When we begin to clearly see the need to utilise one's positive potential and to protect it then we begin to see the relevance of the meditation practice, as meditation is a technique to cultivate and utilise a positive potential within ourselves. As well the positive potential we have developed, we protect it so that it doesn't decrease. That is how the meditation practice benefits us in our daily life. As we develop our meditation technique, we begin to develop this intelligence or unique wisdom within ourselves, constantly assessing whether we are engaging in positive deeds or negative ones. This is how the meditation technique actually helps us to develop that wisdom. The way to familiarise ourselves with the positive potential is by further cultivating the good qualities such as genuine kindness and genuine concern for others and wishing them wellbeing.

I personally feel that this attitude of developing kindness and genuine concern for others and thinking about the plight of other beings who are suffering, is very valuable. There is no match for these positive attitudes. They are essential for feeling genuine wellbeing and genuine peace within oneself. Even though I cannot claim that I do high levels of practices, the one thing that I can say that I competently do is, throughout the day, to periodically recall the value of a kind mind, and try to develop an attitude that whatever I do may be of benefit for others. Even when I am engaging in normal activities such as eating or walking about, I try to recall again and again the thought of wishing my deeds of body, speech and mind to become a means to serve and be of benefit for others. When I develop that, it brings me great solace. So when I experience the great benefit of this attitude within myself then that gives me some confidence, to be able to share it with others.

It is important that we first work at levels that are manageable for us. The level that we need to first adopt and work with is the one that will be most beneficial for us, rather than trying some high level of practices. To establish a solid foundation, we need to engage in the practices that we have access to and are familiar with. Gradually from this level of practice, which forms a sound foundation, we can slowly adopt other practices. To give an analogy, it would be like trying to construct a wall on a wobbly base—it will collapse and fall apart. However, if you make a good foundation when the layers of bricks they are put in place they will form a stable, firm wall.

Whatever meditation practice we adopt, we need to ensure that it becomes a technique to ultimately help subdue our mind—removing the negativities and the delusions, while increasing the positive qualities. In summary, a meditation practice is a technique to increase our positive qualities within ourselves while decreasing our negativities. The great masters have mentioned, that a sure sign of meditation practice becoming effective is when we notice the delusions within our mind lessening. When we detect delusions or negativities in our mind becoming less intense, then that is a true mark of meditation practice taking effect. This is something which we need to really keep in mind to ensure that whatever effort and time we do spend in the practice of meditation, actually works towards the end of deriving positive results. When we adopt the practice of meditation with that understanding in our mind, that will increase the positive attitude in our mind which is the purpose of meditation.

To emphasise the point mentioned earlier, the great master, Lama Tsongkapa also mentioned that the true sign that one is practising the Dharma is that it serves as a means to lessen the intensity of the delusions within one's mind. That is a true mark of the practice of Dharma. Furthermore if we find that our faith increases then that is yet another mark of having practised the Dharma. When our faith in the value of the Dharma increases within ourselves then that is a true mark of the Dharma practice becoming effective. Our faith increases only with the positive experience one gains from the Dharma. That will be a mark of true transformation taking place within ourselves.

We need to adopt the meditation posture now by adjusting our physical posture so that it is relaxed and upright. Then, check if our state of mind is in a positive and clear state. The object that we focus on in our meditation is our own breath. Choosing the breath as an object is a very effective object to focus on in order to settle down our mind. Many great masters have agreed unanimously that the breath is a very effective object for this purpose. It is not an obscure object but something with which we are intimately familiar. We all use our breath as a medium to survive, so as an object to focus it is not really complex or difficult, yet it is very effective.

The great Indian master, Kamalashila has mentioned that in meditation the breath should not be laboured; it should be soundless and also effortless. So based on that very natural rhythm of our breath, then we keep our entire focus on the breath itself and distancing our mind from all other forms of distractions. Bringing this technique to mind we try to adopt the meditation technique here with a sincere mind completely focused on the breath itself for the next few minutes

Are there any questions?

Q: Why do we get upset when others challenge our religious beliefs?

A: Of course that is typical example of grasping too much on one's belief. When one has a strong grasping at one's belief then that is where the agitation comes from. In relation to that, when we Buddhist teachers came to the west for the first time His Holiness the Dalai Lama

advised us, as I recall, "when you go to the west make sure that you don't teach with an attitude of trying to make more Buddhists, but rather share whatever knowledge and understanding of the Buddha's teaching that you have, with the sole intention to benefit others". This also depends on whether one's attitude it is a positive attitude and useful for others.

Many years ago, I was asked to give a talk on Buddhism in an art gallery, and soon after my talk Hindu teacher was scheduled to teach. It was brought to my attention that when he started teaching, then rather than teaching about his own faith and religion, the first thing he started to say was that Buddhist don't have a real technique of meditation. So he started off by putting down Buddhism.

Of course, it didn't really make much difference to me. Someone who has an intelligent mind would immediately recognise the absurdity of what he was saying. If I give a talk on Buddhism and someone comes out and says, "oh, Buddhism doesn't have much essence or doesn't have the right technique of meditation and so forth", an intelligent person would see through that and, rather than seeing them as propounding their qualities they are actually propounding their faults. When you find faults in someone else an intelligent person would see that in itself as a fault rather than a quality. So even though he might have done it as an attempt to promote what he has to teach about Hinduism, in fact he had tainted his own talk by mentioning that.

It is good to remember what the Dalai Lama has said about the diversity of religions. He always claims that each and every religion is quite unique and has great potential to benefit others, and therefore every religion has its own value. However we cannot say that we can combine all the religions into one and have one religion, because individuals have different inclinations and so some form of practice would suit some better than others. Therefore the diversity of religion is something that is necessary.

The Dalai Lama always promotes harmony and good relationships between the different religions and talks about the value of each religion and the need for the diversity of religion in order to meet the needs of individual beings. When the Dalai Lama expressed this in his talk, there was a Jewish rabbi who actually praised the Dalai Lama's remarks, saying to me "You are very lucky to have such a spiritual head, no other spiritual head would be talking so openly about the need for harmony and the need for the diversity of religions; It is really fortunate to have such a spiritual leader". So this is an example of someone who is intelligent, seeing the great quality and values of what the Dalai Lama has to share.

Q: Can one maintain one's own belief system while adopting Buddhism?

A: To quote the Dalai Lama again, that is definitely possible because, as he says, it is important for you to maintain whatever religion that you were brought up with, the religion of your heart and family. As I regularly emphasise again and again people need not feel that they have to be Buddhist when they come here. If there is something that you find useful, that you can adopt for your life or your practice, that is the main thing. People

need not feel that they have to be Buddhist to become a member of Tara Institute or to attend the teachings. That I regularly emphasise. For example, there was someone who has been coming regularly to the talks that I have been giving here and then at one point when I was giving what is called the Buddhist ceremony of Taking Refuge, he asked me whether he should take the Buddhist refuge, as he was actually an Orthodox Christian. I said that it was not necessary for him to take refuge.

So the main intention I have in sharing the Buddhist teachings is for your benefit, there is no other intention from my side. So if it serves that purpose then it makes me happy. Also from the Buddhist side there are Buddhist monks who are sent to Christian monasteries to study and learn from their tradition.

I have gone to chapels and paid respect, and I feel comfortable in doing that. The Dalai Lama's wishes that each tradition and religion can learn and share with each other; that is something useful. Dalai Lama has initiated and prompted interfaith dialogue and it seems like the other religions are also taking the initiative of doing that as well.

Q. Geshe Loden passed away recently and he was one of my teachers from whom I have received teachings in the past. What prayers would be best to say at this time?

A: There is a prayer called *The King of Prayers*, so you can do that. Geshe Loden's own instructions were to do this prayer when he passed away. So it is good to follow his instructions. He left full instructions about what prayers to do, and he mentioned that I would help. From my side, I went Thursday, Friday and Saturday. I couldn't go on Sunday but I went on Monday, and I am planning to go again tomorrow. The list of prayers includes *The King of Prayers*, different prayers to Maitreya and so forth. And also the text composed by Shantideva, *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*. So the main thing, of course, is to make strong aspirational prayers; that will be good. So whatever you feel appropriate, if you find some prayers appropriate for you to do then to do with strong aspiration in your mind will be sufficient.

Q: Can one teach meditation to a mentally retarded person?

A: In that situation it is not easy right away, however if you perhaps apply shorter sessions, one, two, three minutes. Today one minute, then maybe tomorrow two minutes, and three minutes on the day after. The main thing initially is to have some stability rather than duration; the quality is more important than the quantity. It depends on whether the technique works for them. Regardless of the mental disability, if it helps them to focus a bit then to that extent it will help them. So it comes down to whether that technique has some effect or not.

With someone with a mental disability then the best approach would be a very, very gradual approach; to give only something which is manageable for them. If something works then be satisfied with that and just slowly continue with that. Of course it is the nature of the mind, that it can become better with familiarity. That is the natural quality of the mind. It is more a case of

finding a suitable person to teach such meditation to mentally disabled people, because it will need a lot of patience and endurance. So the main thing is that one has to have the great skill to be able to teach them and a compassionate mind.

So, thanks very much for all the questions, they were good questions. I am not sure about my answers though.

Before we end the session for the evening, let us spend a few minutes in meditation again. This time focusing on the sound of the mantra to be recited which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

Transcribed by Su Lan Foo
Edit 1 by Venerable Lozang Rigsal
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version
© Tara Institute