
The Condensed Lam Rim

༄༅། །བྱང་ལྷོ་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བཞུགས་སོ། །

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

4 April 2012

As usual we will spend some time for meditation, so we can sit in a comfortable, relaxed posture. As the great master Lama Tsong Khapa said, what determines whether our actions are positive or negative depends on our state of mind. Everything is related to our mind.

There are two different types of actions, summarised into positive or negative. Whether an action is positive or negative depends on the state of mind that precedes the action. If the mind is in a positive state prior to engaging in the action, that action becomes a positive action. Likewise, if the mind is in a negative state, then the action that follows that state of mind is a negative action. A positive state of mind is summarised as having a kind attitude. So the most basic state of mind that we need to focus on and try to develop is a kind attitude. This is the main thing.

To summarise the process of the cause and effect sequence, first we have a certain state of mind which is followed by actions, then those actions bring about certain results that we experience. So when we cultivate a kind attitude or state of mind, naturally the actions that follow become positive actions that bring about positive results, which benefit others. The actions here relate to our physical and verbal actions. With a kind positive attitude, our verbal and physical actions become kind gestures that are appreciated by others. Not only humans, but even animals can definitely appreciate our kind gestures. So it's worthwhile that we pay attention to this.

To explain more specifically how our physical and verbal actions are related to our state of our mind, when we are in a positive state of mind, we display pleasant physical gestures along with pleasant speech, which is appreciated by others. This has a positive effect on other people, including those we are closest to. However, we often find that in relation to those who are close to us, we often behave the very opposite; displaying unpleasant physical gestures and unpleasant words, which make them feel uncomfortable. And that starts to develop strain on the relationship between you and them. So we definitely need to pay attention to our thoughts, speech and physical behaviour. The very people that we need to be pleasant and kind to are those that we associate with in our daily life, particularly people close to us. In order to do that, we need to develop and maintain a positive state of mind. Whenever we are not able to express ourselves with pleasant physical gestures and pleasant speech, we find it is because we have not been able to maintain a positive state of mind. So the unpleasant gestures follow. Thus, we need to protect our state of mind.

When we begin to understand how our every action is related to the state of our mind, then we understand that every positive gesture is also related to our positive state of mind. When we begin to recognise and acknowledge that, then the importance of protecting our mind becomes very clear. Whatever the cost, we need to protect our mind from negativity, which will harm ourselves and others. When we are able to avert the negative state of mind and maintain a positive state of mind, the benefit is for both ourselves and others. A positive state of mind is something that we need to pay attention to, and encourage ourselves to cultivate and further develop.

As the great master Sakya Pandita mentioned, "The true mark of a great scholar - the more learned and more wise they are, the less likely that their kind gestures will be altered." In other words, a true mark of a great and wise being is that their gestures never differ from being kind and considerate to others. That is something that we need to be mindful about. In adopting that sort of advice on a personal level, we need to ensure that the more understanding we gain, the more we need to try to show a real, true consideration and kind gestures towards other people, by developing a positive state of mind. This is something that we need to apply to ourselves.

If we agree that it is essential to develop a positive state of mind, then we begin to understand the relevance of a meditation practice. Meditation is a technique for familiarising our mind with being in a positive frame of mind and to generate a kind mind. Ultimately, that is the purpose of meditation. So when we relate to the practice of meditation in this way, we begin to also acknowledge that the meditation practice is a cause for great happiness. If we apply this technique, it is the cause for increasing bliss and a sense of wellbeing and happiness within ourselves. If we neglect the meditation practice and if we don't pay attention to the state of our mind, then we are letting our mind just follow its natural course, which means it will follow a negative path; which is the particular cause to experience great unhappiness and great sorrow. The ultimate means to protect our mind is to meditate regularly. This is a technique and method that I use in trying to acquire happiness for myself. Perhaps some may say it's not correct. However, I have personally gained much benefit from such practice. The more I familiarise myself with the meditation technique, I find that I gain more confidence in finding that it is very useful and beneficial. This is my experience.

To summarise the main point, the meditation practice is a means to protect and increase our wellbeing, within our own mind. Protecting and increasing our wellbeing is two-fold: external and internal wellbeing. Internal conditions as a means for our wellbeing and happiness are of primary importance. It is the most important.

So, how do we begin a meditation practice? First of all, we need to understand how our mind experiences distress and unease. How is that experienced? If we analyse and look within, we begin to notice that the reason we experience great distress is because our mind is influenced by negativities, which are associated with the distractions that we follow. Thus the mind experiences turmoil and unease.

To reverse that situation, we need to intentionally develop a mind that focuses within. Rather than focusing on external distractions, we bring our focus within ourselves. Then having brought the focus within, we apply that attention and focus on a positive object, one that does not cause our mind to be in a negative state. The mind then experiences great ease and comfort, and the positiveness in the mind begins to increase. We will begin to notice that there is a great benefit if we bring our focus within, and great loss if we allow our mind to be completely distracted with sensual pleasures.

To emphasise the point, if we allow our mind to be completely influenced by external distractions, then all sorts of negative influences will start to dominate our mind, such as anxiety and fear and so forth. In Tibetan we have a term, 'Our mind becomes very superstitious'. The mind becomes superstitious because it is prone to being influenced in a way that brings us a lot of doubts and worries and fears. Because of that, when our mind is dominated by states of mind such as fear, anxiety, and uncertainty, then that brings unease and discomfort within.

As His Holiness the Dalai Lama shares from his life experience when he was growing up as a child, he mentions that when he was very young and in the Potala Palace, the sweepers and others would caution him about going into certain corridors and rooms. Rather than stopping him directly from going into all these different rooms, they would say, 'There are ghosts in these rooms so you should not go'. His Holiness the Dalai Lama said, "Of course in hindsight it would be absurd to think that there were actually ghosts there. But as a child that brought about anxiety and fear in the mind. So even though there are no ghosts there, it brings an unsettled feeling within the mind." He was giving this as an example of how irrational and unnecessary fears and doubts can arise in the mind when it has been influenced by superstition. Thus we need to protect our mind.

Now we will engage in the meditation practice. We again readjust our physical posture to sit in an upright and comfortable posture. Then likewise with our state of mind, we try to ensure that our mind is free from immediate distractions. We need to make the commitment that for the next few minutes 'I will not allow my mind to be influenced by past memories or speculations of the future and I will not allow any sort of distractions to influence my mind'. Thus, we bring our focus within ourselves and place it upon the chosen object for our meditation, which is our own breath. We place our full attention and focus on our natural breathing. As we breathe in and out naturally from our nostrils, we try to maintain complete awareness and focus on the breath itself.

[meditation]

We can definitely benefit if we implement the practice of meditation into our daily life, as it serves as a technique to protect our positive mind, and to further develop and increase a kind attitude within us. A kind and considerate attitude protects us from exhibiting unpleasant gestures and words to others. We can start to practice expressing

pleasant and gentle words and gestures to others. This is the main purpose of meditation.

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

4.2.2.1.2.3.2. The actual paths

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2. How to develop an awakening mind

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1. The stages of training the awakening mind

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1. Training the mind in the pith instructions on the six causes and effect, which comes from the lineage traced to the great master Atisha

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2. Extensive explanation

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2. The actual training in the stages

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1. Training the mind to strive for the welfare of others

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1. Establishing the basis for that mind to arise

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1.2. Establishing the appealing aspect of all

The subject that we are studying now is, first of all, the methods and ways to develop the most altruistic state of mind, which is called the awakening mind, or bodhicitta. Particularly, it is an altruistic state of mind that is determined to benefit others. So in order to develop that, as the teachings explain, there are two particular techniques. The technique of exchanging self with others, and the technique of the seven-point cause and effect of developing the altruistic mind. Within the seven-point cause and effect of developing the altruistic mind, first of all we need to train our mind to develop equanimity towards all beings. The first training, in order to develop love and compassion for others, is to develop an unbiased mind towards all beings. Based on that unbiased attitude towards all beings, we can further develop and cultivate that to feel love and compassion towards others.

Developing that unbiased mind is called equanimity towards all. Based on that, within the seven-point cause and effect sequence, the first thing is to recognise that all beings have been our mother in the past. The particular attitude that we need to develop in this training of the mind is to see how all beings are equal in having been our mother. They are all equal because they have been our mother at one time or another. The way to develop that state of mind, the understanding or recognition that all beings have been our mother, is based on the understanding of the continuity of our mind. What makes us an individual is our physical body and mind. In relation to our mind, there is no beginning of our mind. If there is no beginning to the mind, then there is no beginning to our previous rebirths.

Thus we've had infinite lives before our present life. We have had countless numbers of lives in the past, but we cannot assert that we have had the same mother in all our lives. That would be absurd. We would have had different mothers in different lifetimes. Thus since there are infinite lives that we have had in the past, we would have had infinite mothers. With reasoning and insights through meditation, we will begin to not only accept this, but to really recognise this as being the truth. In our meditation we can reach a point where we develop affection towards all beings that is the same sort of affection that we have towards our mother in this lifetime. Our mother of this life always has a special place

in our heart and in our mind, particularly when we think about how kind she has been in this life. So similarly, we can develop that same attitude towards all beings. This is something that comes through our own experience in meditation when we think about their kindness. Just as our mother has been in this life, other beings would have been similarly kind to us in past lives. So with that thought, we develop a kind and loving attitude towards all beings.

We need to reflect upon the main essence of what is being presented here. We are trying to see all beings in an equal light, with an unbiased state of mind towards all. Not only an unbiased attitude, but seeing them as being very close, and feeling affection towards all of them. In general, when we think about the importance of having good relations with other people, we naturally feel that if we could see everyone as a relative, that would be nice. So this technique is providing us the method to not only see others as related to us, but as the closest of relations, which is our own mother. Thus if we can develop that attitude of seeing others as being as kind to us and close to us as our own mother, then a natural feeling of warmth and affection and a willingness to do something for them will follow.

This presentation is a very systematic and logical presentation. It's based on logical reasons explaining how it is possible for all beings to have been our mother.

There are two parts to recognising all sentient beings as our mother. The first is that they have been our mothers in the past. The next part is reflecting on the fact that they will still be our mothers in future lifetimes as well. Having recognised all beings having been our mother in the past, we develop the conviction that even in the future they will continue to be our mothers. In this way, as we develop the recognition, we will remember the kindness of all our mothers. To read from the text:

Moreover, all beings have not only previously been your mothers but will also be your mothers in the future a limitless number of times. Reflect upon this and become convinced that all beings have been your mothers. Once you have developed this conviction, you will then easily remember their kindness. If you do not develop it, you will have no basis for remembering their kindness.

Knowing that all beings have been our mother in the past and will be so in the future, establishes the basis within our mind to remember the kindness of all beings. Even in ordinary or mundane circumstances, if someone has been kind to us we remember their kindness. If we don't recall who they are and how they have been kind to us, then there is no basis for us to recall the kindness that they have shown us. So when we remember them, we will remember their kindness and then gratitude will naturally develop. Similarly, when we recognise all beings having been our mother in the past, this is based on remembering the kindness of our own mother in this life. When we reflect upon the kindness of our own mother in this life, then this becomes the basis for us to understand how each and every other being has also shown kindness to us in similar ways. All beings have been equal in being kind to us.

In presenting the same topic in the earlier teachings, I recall that once, when I was teaching on the kindness of the mother, I explained that if someone gives us a meal on one or two occasions, we would consider them as being kind for offering us a meal. So in my attempt for students to develop the awareness of the kindness of the mother, I give them an assignment: "For our next session, during a break you will count the number of times your mother has fed you, has given you just even lunch. Come back with a number of how many times your mother has fed you." At the next session, of course students said that they couldn't recall. There were too many times. So based on this fact that here we are only guesstimating how many lunches the mother has given. Some students of course did their calculations based on how old they were, and then tried to come up with a calculation! But of course there's not only lunch, there's dinners and breakfasts. Providing meals is only one factor of our existence and how the mother has helped to sustain us.

Students later commented that it was very helpful in pointing out how the mother has been extremely kind to them. We take it for granted that our mother has to feed us. When we think about all the different ways of how our mother has been kind to us, it really dawns upon us of how extremely kind our mother in fact has been, and is. These are important points for us to consider. Otherwise, people might say, 'Oh, my mother is not kind to me; she is not a nice person'. It is easy for us to fail to recognise the kindness of the mother if we don't pay attention to it.

Before we conclude for the evening, let us spend a few minutes in meditation. The object of our meditation will be the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. Keep our complete attention and focus of our mind on the sound of the mantra and then maintain that focus for a while after the recitation subsides.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

Transcribed by Peter Boothby

Edit 1 by Cynthia Karena

Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

Edited Version

© Tara Institute