
The Condensed Lam Rim

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25 June 2003

We can practise a little bit of meditation as usual. Sit in a good meditation posture. Then, similarly to putting the body in a good meditation posture, you have to place the mind in a good state. If we have a good physical posture but the mind is not in a good state it leads only to misery. Ordinarily we only concentrate on having a good physical body and we don't worry about having a good mind. By having this attitude we create many problems. One should actually look after one's mind as well as one looks after one's body.

Meditation is the way of looking after one's mind, taking hold of one's mind. If one doesn't take hold of one's mind through meditation one cannot generate mental happiness, but by taking hold of one's mind through meditation one can get a grasp on mental happiness. Therefore it is very important that one strives in meditation. One shouldn't think, 'Oh, my mind is too difficult to be pacified. I have such a complicated mind that it is too difficult to subdue and change, Even though meditation might work for others it won't work for me'. One shouldn't have that type of attitude, even though of course it is difficult to achieve progress in ones meditation, but if one has that type of attitude one puts oneself under the control of that crazy mind. By taking it slowly one can step by step, slowly, slowly, make the mind more peaceful, more stable and happier.

One needs to engage in action in order to attain a result. If one doesn't strive then, of course, one won't achieve any result. But by striving in positive ways the mind will change and become more positive. It is the same regardless of whether it is an internal result that one wants to achieve or an external result. It won't come about if one doesn't engage in an action to bring about the result. But, by having a strong motivation and engaging in the action, one can definitely achieve the desired fruit.

Some people have the idea that it doesn't matter for them whether they meditate or not - they think that their mind will be restless in any case. That is the wrong attitude to have. One has to meditate consistently in a correct manner and then, slowly over time, the mind will settle down. One shouldn't have the attitude, 'It doesn't work for my mind'. One also shouldn't concentrate on having too long sessions. That is not important. It is better to have short and clear meditation sessions, which then one can increase over time.

It is important to understand the wisdom that understands the benefits of meditation and, by being aware of the benefits of meditation, one will be

automatically induced to meditate. Now we bring the mind back home, removing it from external objects, and focus it totally towards the inside. Then, from within that state, we place the mind single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath. Meditating in such a manner on the coming and going of the breath has a subduing effect on the mental afflictions. *Pause for meditation.*

The four greatnesses

The greatness that all teachings of the Buddha appear as advice and instructions

Last time we started to talk about the second greatness of the Lam Rim - that it makes one understand that all the teachings are instructions and advice. The teachings can be divided into the scriptural teachings and the realised teachings. The scriptural teachings convey that which has to be practised, and then, by putting that which is being conveyed by the scriptural teachings into practise one generates the realised teachings within the mind. The practice of the meaning that is conveyed by the scriptural teachings becomes the realised teaching. In this way the scriptural teaching and the realised teaching are cause and effect. First the scriptural teaching conveys what has to be practised and one has to put that immediately into practise and then, in such a way, generate the realised teachings. That is how one comes to view the teachings. Everything has to be put into practise.

So one has to put into practise the teachings that one listens to. There is not a separate category of teachings that are specifically for practise. It is not as if one kind of teaching is for listening and another kind of teaching is for practise. The teachings that one listens to are the teachings that one has to put into practise. Lama Tsongkhapa says that if, after having listened for a long time one still doesn't know what to practise, then that is a fault of not having received the benefit of the second greatness of the Lam Rim - that every teaching will appear as advice and instruction. For example, in order to race a horse you make a racetrack for the horse. Then, after having prepared the racetrack for the horse, if you race the horse somewhere else it's quite meaningless. That is similar. If you listen to many teachings and then wonder, 'What am I supposed to practise?' that's not the right attitude.

One has to practise that which one has understood through listening and contemplation. What one has understood through listening and contemplation is what one has to meditate upon. So, first one engages in listening and then secondly one engages in contemplation on what one has listened to and then, thirdly, one meditates on what one has contemplated. The initial ascertainment of the meaning of what one has listened to will be a little bit shaky. When one listens to a teaching, such as someone explaining to us the benefits of meditation and that we should practise meditation, we generate enthusiasm and belief in our mind but the ascertainment of what has to be practised and why, what one has to meditate upon and why, will be a little bit shaky because that ascertainment hasn't arisen completely through one's own understanding. It came

about through the outer condition of the teaching. But if one reflects upon the meaning that was conveyed during the teaching then one can ascertain that meaning through one's own understanding - an understanding that one generated without outer conditions. That ascertainment of the conveyed meaning through one's own contemplation and wisdom is very stable. Then, once one has generated the more stable understanding arising through one's own contemplation, one can engage in meditation on the meaning that one understood through contemplation.

So, you can see that there is a sequence and that sequence won't come about if one listens to one thing, but contemplates something else and meditates on a third thing. If one does this then one doesn't get that development. It actually doesn't work at all. Without first listening one won't be able to engage in contemplation. Then, without having had the benefit of contemplation, one won't be able to engage in meditation. They are actually dependent upon each other and the only way they can be generated is in sequence in relation to the topic.

When we listen to teachings we are advised to take time and reflect upon what we have listened to. We are advised to think about what we have listened to, to analyse it, to see whether it is supported by valid reasoning, whether there are good reasons to engage in that action, whether it is valid and so forth. Then, through the force of our own contemplation, when we have understood the benefit and necessity for meditation we can naturally engage in the practise of meditation. We should take the time and reflect upon what we have listened to and not just tell ourselves we have to engage in meditation and then try to push ourselves to meditate without having the actual understanding of why it is necessary to meditate.

The great Indian pandit Kamalashila said that the wisdom of meditation is generated in relation to the preceding wisdom arising from listening and contemplation and, if that doesn't happen, it will be like the example of preparing a racetrack for a horse and then taking the horse somewhere else to race. First one prepares with listening, generating the wisdom of listening and contemplation and then one has to go down that track with meditation.

Listening, contemplation and meditation have to be practised in a unified manner. They should benefit each other. The more one listens to teachings the more that should benefit one's contemplation. The more extensive one's contemplation becomes the more one will listen and the more one's wisdom of meditation will increase. They should complement each other.

All the important points of the path that are explained in the Buddha's teachings, including the commentaries, starting from guru devotion up to calm abiding and special insight, are contained complete within the Lam Rim teachings. The Lam Rim explains, in a holistic manner, the sequence of practise of those topics. It explains how one has to meditate on all those topics with

placement meditation and how one has to meditate on all those topics with analytical meditation - generating discriminating wisdom awareness with regards to all those topics. The sequence and the way of doing this is explained in a holistic manner in the Lam Rim teachings. From this one gains an insight into the complete path to enlightenment and then all the teachings of the Buddha will appear to one as advice and instructions for practice because one will be able to place them in the appropriate place in the graduated path to enlightenment - one knows their purpose and practice. If, having studied the Lam Rim, one then studies the more extensive teachings of the Buddha and one studies different topics one will always be able to add something to what one is studying. Because one already has an understanding of the Lam Rim one will be able to place those topics within the path and one will be able to recognise their purpose and their need.

Therefore, in this way, one recognises that all the teachings of the Buddha are actually meant as advice for practice and one will be protected from generating the wrong view that holds that some teachings of the Buddha are the main teachings of the Buddha and other teachings are not the actual teachings of the Buddha but are more like supporting teachings and not actual teachings or instructions. One will be protected from the wrong view that thinks that only one part of the Buddha's teachings are actual instructions on how to practise, while other teachings are not the actual instructions, but merely act as a background - a fill-in. One will be protected from this type of wrong view.

By generating a good understanding of the Lam Rim one will be able to take all the subjects of the Buddha's teachings and use them for practice. By understanding the Lam Rim one has an understanding of the complete overview of the whole path. Thereafter one will be able to understand that whatever one reads is an instruction for practice and will understand that it is contained within the practise of the path. One will be able to condense every other teaching that one reads thereafter within the practise of the path. For example, if one has a vessel in which one is collecting rice and then one gets hold of some rice, even if it is just a little bit, one can put it into that vessel together with the other rice. One knows what to do with it. Likewise, by having an understanding of the Lam Rim, with any other teaching thereafter that one receives one will be able to relate it back to the Lam Rim and know the place, function and so forth of that teaching. One can condense it within the practise of the path. If one doesn't have a glass in which one can collect rice and then one gets hold of a little bit of rice in one's hand one doesn't know what to do with it and just throws it away. It's like that.

If one has an understanding of the Lam Rim and then one receives teachings on death and impermanence one immediately knows these teachings belong to the category of the practitioner of small capacity. If one receives teachings on dependant arising one knows that they are teachings belonging to the practice of the being of medium capacity. And if one receives teachings on

bodhicitta one immediately knows that teaching falls within the category of practises of the being of greatest capacity.

One day while he was still young Pabongka Rinpoche was circumambulating a temple and he found a piece of scripture in a small hut on which was written some advice by the Dalai Lama Kelsang Gyatso. First it gave the analogy of the bee that flies all day long from one colourful flower to the next, never abiding on any flower for very long. Then it said that likewise day and night, the mind without questioning and investigating follows its distorted perceptions of reality and constantly switches back and forth between friend, enemy and stranger, and that one can't find a true and reliable friend in cyclic existence. When Pabonka Rinpoche read this he could immediately relate it to the Lam Rim and relate it to the first of the six sufferings, the suffering of indefiniteness or the unreliability of samsaric perfection. If one has an understanding of the Lam Rim then one can immediately take a lot of meaning from such a short advice and, by understanding the indefiniteness of friend, enemy and stranger, one can immediately decrease one's suffering.

If you have questions, we can have one question.

Question: Which category of teachings does calm abiding belong to?

That's a very good question. The practice of calm abiding, from one point of view, falls into the category of the being of medium capacity because the main practices of the practitioner of medium capacity are the three higher trainings. The second higher training is the higher training of concentration, which is posited as the practice of calm abiding. However, it is also explained at the time of the practitioner of great capacity.

In the Lam Rim the benefits of calm abiding and the practice of calm abiding are explained in relation to the being of great capacity in the context of the practice of Mahayana. Therefore, it is only explained in a very brief manner in relation to the being of small capacity - going very briefly over the benefits and methods. However, if calm abiding wasn't explained extensively in relation to the being of great capacity then it would have to be explained at the time of the being of medium capacity.

The main aim of the being of medium capacity is liberation and in order to attain liberation one needs to practise the higher training of wisdom. The higher training of wisdom depends upon the higher training of concentration. The higher training of concentration is an essential practice for a being of medium capacity and the higher training of concentration in turn depends upon the higher training of morality.

The analogy of a person who wants to cut down a tree is used to explain the relationship between the higher trainings of morality, concentration and wisdom. In this analogy three things are needed; first of all one needs to have a very sharp axe, then one needs to have a strong arm and then the body to which the arm is attached needs to be firm and strong. They all relate one to the other. The arm is attached to the body and the axe is held

by the arm. If one of those three conditions is missing then one cannot cut down the tree. Likewise wisdom is held by the arm of concentration and the arm of concentration relies upon the very firm body of morality.

The axe is actually cutting the tree; that is the higher training of wisdom. But one won't be able to fell the tree with the axe if one's arm is shaky and unstable. If one's hand is infirm then one can't fell the tree with the axe because one will just hit the tree all over the place. So one needs to have a very stable arm. The arm is the analogy for the higher training of concentration that holds the higher training of wisdom. One needs to have very firm concentration with which one can hold the wisdom that cuts off the root of cyclic existence, which is ignorance. And all of that depends on having the very firm and strong body of morality.

The way one reaches liberation with the three higher trainings is that firstly the higher training of morality subdues the coarse conceptualising mind. By subduing one's actions of body and speech one will engage in less coarse physical and verbal actions and thus avoid the associated coarse conceptualising thoughts as the mind will be less distracted towards external objects. Merely by practising morality the mind will be more internally concentrated, more naturally placed internally. Then, after having subdued coarse conceptualising thoughts with the practice of morality, one has to subdue the coarse and subtle distractions. These coarse distractions are mental excitement and mental sinking, and the subtle distraction is the ignorance of self-grasping. The coarse distraction of mental excitement and mental sinking can be overcome through the higher training of concentration and then the subtle distraction of self-grasping with wisdom.

As was explained before, bring the mind back home, focus it inwards and then place it on the name mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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