
The Condensed Lam Rim

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First, we will do a bit of meditation as usual. Sit in a comfortable, appropriate physical position.

We have to analyse whether it is more beneficial to subdue the mind or whether it is more beneficial to let the mind just fall under the control of the conceptual thoughts. One should look into what is more useful – and one will probably find that it is better to subdue the mind.

Analysing which types of action are beneficial and wholesome on the one hand, and which are harmful and negative on the other, is a good thing to do. Normally, the underlying motivation for all our actions is to attain every possible happiness for ourselves, and eliminate any type of suffering. Since we have carried out all of our actions throughout our life with this motivation, by now we should have some result from our labours – we should have some mental satisfaction and happiness to show for our actions. However, if you look at the results of our actions, apart from not having even been able to attain inner mental satisfaction, quite often we even lack temporal happiness.

When we look at our situation, we should arrive at the conclusion that we are in such a situation because of the unsubdued mind. If we do not subdue our mind, we will continue to have a difficult life, so we really must subdue the mind.

We should be able to see that we will not attain happiness by being continually busy, physically, verbally and mentally. Rather, instead of engaging into busy actions of body, speech and mind, one should try to relax and contain the mind internally, bringing it to a calm state. This is a much better way to attain happiness.

One should be able to arrive at this conclusion oneself. We know from our experience that if we stop distracting the mind and are alone and undisturbed by others, the mind will become calm and comfortable. This is how we should think about meditation. By withdrawing the mind from 'busy-ness' and stress and bringing it back home, containing it internally, the mind becomes very happy and pliable. From this point of view, meditation is necessary for everyone – young, middle-aged and older people.

We all hold on to certain thoughts that make the mind unhappy. If being unhappy oneself were to make others happy, then it might be beneficial. But the type of thought that induces unhappiness benefits neither oneself nor others. There is no benefit to others and no benefit to oneself. Rather, one's mind becomes depressed, and one feels powerless, weak, and unable to do things.

At such a time, it would be much better if one could let go of negative thoughts, and not let the mind fall under their control. Rather, one should bring the mind back home to a calm state and withdraw it from the disturbing, external objects.

So, after having focused the mind internally 100%, from within that space, place the mind single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath and meditate in this way for a few minutes. *[Pause for meditation.]* If you all practised meditation like we do here on a regular basis, I think it would be very beneficial.

3.2. The way of teaching the dharma

3.2.1. Contemplating the benefits of teaching the dharma

Developing reverence for the Dharma and the teacher:

Last time we talked about the benefits of teaching the Dharma. We said that receiving the benefits arising from teaching the Dharma are relative to the good motivation with which the Dharma is taught.

Relating this to our personal practice, when we recite our prayers, we can visualise being surrounded by all sentient beings in the aspect of humans; as we recite the prayers, we can imagine that we are teaching them the Dharma. Then, when we conclude our prayers, we can also make some sort of dedication to that effect. This is why we recite the prayers aloud – so that we can imagine ourselves teaching all sentient beings, who surround us and are in the aspect of humans.

Also, teaching the Dharma is not confined to sitting on a throne. One can teach the Dharma in everyday conversation. For example, if one is having a chat with acquaintances and friends, one can weave some Dharma into the conversation, regarding what must be practised and what must be stopped. If this is done with a good motivation, it is like teaching the Dharma – it becomes the generosity of giving the Dharma.

Of the two, material generosity and the generosity of giving the Dharma, giving the Dharma is much more meritorious. If one gives Dharma advice to a friend to help them overcome some difficulty or deal with a problem, it becomes the generosity of the Dharma, regardless of whether it benefits the other person's mind or not. One can talk about the Dharma and give advice with motivation of wanting to help the person and, if it is done with the right motivation, it becomes the generosity of the Dharma regardless of whether or not it benefits that person.

Just by saying the right things, one can make another person happy. One can give that other person ten minutes or one hour of happiness. This is a type of generosity.

The 20 benefits of teaching the Dharma

We will go on to enumerate the actual benefits of teaching the Dharma. There are 20 mentioned in the sutra called 'Exhorting the Superior Intention', but I'm not sure whether it may be a bit much for you if we go through all of them!

1) Generosity of the Dharma will ensure that one's own mindfulness will be stable. That means one won't forget the dharma. 2) Then one will become endowed with the wisdom realising ultimate truth that arises from meditation. 3) And then one will become endowed with the wisdom understanding conventional reality that arises from contemplation. 4) One's mind will become endowed with stability, meaning that it won't be stolen away. 5) One will become endowed with wisdom. This relates to the worldly wisdom generated on the path of accumulation and the path of preparation. 6) One will also become endowed with the wisdom having gone beyond – that is, the wisdom that is generated on the path of seeing and on the path of meditation. 7) One will have less desire, 8) less anger, 9) less ignorance. 10) One won't be outdone by the maras. 11) One will come to the attention of the Buddhas; 12) Be protected by non-humans; 13) The gods will endow one with their splendour; 14) One's enemies won't outdo one; 15) One will not be separated from friends and relatives; 16) One's words will become pure; 17) One will attain fearlessness; 18) One will have more mental happiness; 19) One will be praised by the sages and 20) One's generosity of the Dharma will be worth remembering.

3.2.2. Developing reverence for the Dharma and the teacher:

The next outline is generating reverence for the teacher and the Dharma. One does this by being mindful of the kindness and the qualities of the teacher and the Dharma. Before teaching the Dharma, one generates respect for the Buddha and for the Dharma by remembering their kindness and their qualities.

3.2.3. How to think and act when teaching

Regarding the state of mind with which one should teach the Dharma, the sutra lists five recognitions that correspond to the six recognitions to be adopted by the disciples.

The five recognitions

1. One should recognise oneself as the doctor.
2. One should recognise the Dharma as the medicine.
3. One should recognise those who listen to the Dharma as the patients.
4. One should recognise the Buddha as a holy being.
5. One should have the wish for the Dharma to abide for a long time.

One should also meditate on love for the disciples. Further one should abandon jealous thoughts such as 'There is someone else higher than me'; procrastinating laziness; any feeling of being tired of saying the same thing over and over again; praising oneself and highlighting the faults of others; being greedy with the Dharma; and being focused on food, clothing, material possessions, and so forth. One should regard the merit one attains by teaching the Dharma for the enlightenment of oneself and others is like a very joyous possession.

Next time, we will go into these points in a bit more detail and discuss what they mean. Do you have any questions?

Question: How do you talk to someone, help someone, who has no knowledge of the Dharma and is extremely materialistic and unhappy with their life?

Answer: The meditation on love could be useful, because love is something that is universally accepted as being beneficial and useful. If that person practised more love, became more loving, they would be a Dharma practitioner, regardless of whether they accept the Dharma or not.

In order to get someone to accept the Dharma, one has to be skilful over a long period. People don't accept the Dharma all at once – it takes time.

Once upon a time in India, an adept put a cloth over the skeleton of an elephant to form a tent, and sat inside the tent meditating until he had realised emptiness. This person then became quite famous, and the king invited him to give him some Dharma advice.

The first thing this practitioner taught the king was emptiness. He started teaching emptiness to the king and to many of the king's subjects. Then the king thought: 'This is not a good thing. This person is not really a Buddhist. He says that all things that exist are non-existent. He's going to confuse all my subjects'. So, the king had the adept killed because the king thought 'If I let him stay, then he will confuse all my subjects'

Then the king invited another master to teach him. This master told the king that he didn't know how to teach the Dharma (*laughter!*) The king then asked: 'Why? Why can't you teach me the Dharma?'. The teacher replied: 'Because you have very great desires'.

In such a way, this master began teaching the king the Dharma, by first showing him the disadvantages of desire. Slowly, the master was able to lead the king to more profound teachings, and finally the king even realised emptiness himself.

Here, we can see a difference in the skill of teaching – one practitioner immediately told the king the most profound teaching, and the king wasn't able to understand it and generated misunderstanding; while the second teacher was very skilled and could lead the king slowly to a profound understanding of emptiness.

That king had a recurring dream about the first teacher, and was advised that he had to purify that karma, so he engaged in confession and purification and purified the karma of having killed the first practitioner.

When we teach the Dharma to others, we need to talk very pleasantly, and offer them tea and biscuits and food...in such a way one can convey some Dharma to others, and then slowly they can be led to a state when they are also able to understand more difficult things.

Generosity and talking pleasantly are two skilful means employed by bodhisattvas to subdue the minds of others.

For example, even animals are able to recognise when they are being shown kindness. When we give food to an animal and talk pleasantly to it, the animal will recognise

our kindness and good intentions. They might not understand the actual words we are saying, but they will recognise that we are being pleasant and kind, they will recognise the love being shown to them. If we give them food, then they will lose their fear of us and begin to trust us and come closer to us.

However, if we give food to the animal and talk harshly at the same time, the animal will be afraid. It will not trust us. So, even animals can recognise when they are being treated well, with kindness and generosity. Of course, humans can also recognise this and react in a similar way.

Question: I have a friend who asks me about the Dharma, but I'm afraid I will give her the wrong answers. How can I overcome self-doubt in this regard?

Answer: Even if you are not confident about knowing the Dharma well, you can explain those things that you know.

In general, when we talk about the faculty of confidence in conjunction with the Dharma, it relates to a particular ability to be able to faultlessly explain the teachings of the Buddha, and the commentaries. This particular faculty is labelled 'confidence', a quality that one attains at a certain point in one's spiritual development.

However, even if you don't yet have this type of faculty, you can just explain the Dharma according to what you know. For example, you can say: 'That is according to my understanding. That's what I think it means'. And then you can add: 'And most likely I'm right!' (*laughter*).

The idea is that, even if you don't say it explicitly, you can convey the idea that you have some conviction in what you have said. Also, if you are unable to give an answer immediately to a question that is posed to us, you can say: 'I will get back to you later'. I will have to research it and think about it and get back to you later', and then give them the answer later. You can say: 'I'm a bit busy right now (*laughter*), so I'll have to get back to you later on'. But you have to make it sound believable, you have to sound as if you are really pressed for time and as if that were the only reason you can't give the answer right now! (*more laughter*)

Question: What is the relationship between the breath and the mind?

Answer: The mind is sometimes likened to a sighted person without legs who can see well, but cannot walk. The breath is said to be the opposite – like a blind person who can walk. If these two people worked together as a team – the blind person with legs and the person with sight but no legs – they could go wherever they wanted to, because the person with legs could carry the person with good eyesight.

The mind can see an object but it cannot go to the object by itself. For example if our breathing stops, the external consciousnesses also stop. When our breathing stops, the relationship between the body and the mind becomes severed. So, the breath is that which keeps the mind in the body.

For example, if you are feeling so uptight to the point

where you can't breathe properly, and there's no proper flow of the breath, this can cause very strong mental disturbance that may lead to strong mental imbalances. When one meditates properly on the coming and going of the breath, the erratic type of breath that normally increases the conceptualising mind becomes pacified, so the conceptualising mind also becomes pacified and the mind remains very calmly inside us.

Question: My dog was killed the other day. Just before she was killed, I had been saying the 21 Tara Praises and was praying for her to be reborn in a pure land. She was killed by a tree falling on her and a few weeks before this, I had been doing the 21 Praises and requesting her to be reborn in the pure lands. Was I responsible for her death? Also, is it wrong to make my dog do prostrations?

Answer: Saying those prayers and making those requests did not become a condition for your dog's death. Rather, it was very good that you did this. By saying those prayers and making those requests, it was like you had some type of psychic ability, knowing that the dog would die soon. Your actions were like someone who would have had an insight into the dog's death. So making those prayers for your dog to be reborn in the pure lands was a very good thing.

Questioner continues: I was also making prayers for my sister's cat at the same time and stopped doing them!

Answer: Don't stop saying those prayers. We should make prayers for the happiness of others. When we say, 'May all sentient beings be happy', the term 'all sentient beings' would also include your sister's cat. Our prayers should be non-discriminating. When you pray, 'May all sentient beings be happy', we shouldn't discriminate by thinking, 'May only certain sentient beings be happy and others not'. Our prayers should be impartial.

As was explained in the beginning, focus the mind internally, bringing it back home and not engaging with external objects, but rather focusing it internally. From within that space, place the mind single-pointedly on the mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha's.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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