
The Condensed Lam Rim

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We can meditate for a little bit as usual. Sit comfortably in the correct meditation posture. From one point of view, we can say that meditation presents the opportunity for the mind to be happy. The meditator needs to be happy. If the meditator is not happy but persists in the meditation then the meditator will get *sog-lung*¹.

It is good to analyse over the course of a day how many opportunities arise for the mind to be happy, and how many opportunities arise for the body to be happy. For example if, out of 24 hours, you can experience happiness for 12 hours then that's not too bad – being happy 50% of the time is good !

It is important that one has a happy, relaxed and broad mind, because when we engage in actions on the basis of such a mind, we can usually accomplish them comfortably. It is also important for us to analyse our mind throughout the day to see which mental states are prevalent when we experience happiness and which mental states are there when we experience suffering. For example, when we experience happiness, we need to analyse the mind and identify the mental states that have caused that happiness. Similarly, when we experience unhappiness we need to identify the mental states that cause it, and as much as possible try to generate the mental states that are conducive to happiness.

So, we need to identify mental states that cause happiness and those that cause suffering. Then we need to take care not to let the mind fall under the control of mental states that cause suffering. To this end we meditate, because by focusing the mind on a virtuous object we can overcome the problem of the mind being controlled by harmful mental states.

We should not let the mind fall under the control of disturbing mental states. We should make the determination that there is absolutely no benefit in having the mind under the control of these mental states, and use meditation to free the mind from these states. This is what is referred to as subduing the mind – freeing the mind from the control of the disturbing mental states. For this purpose, we meditate.

We need to sit comfortably in the correct meditation posture, focus the mind internally and stop it engaging external objects. After having totally focused the mind internally, place it single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath, letting the mind enter the breath and

focusing on the breathing. We can meditate in that manner for a few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*)

I think it would be very good if you were to meditate like this daily. The real cause of problems in our life is unsuitable thoughts. They are the cause of our suffering and they block our chances of happiness. We have to recognise this and then work towards achieving happiness by overcoming these unsuitable thoughts. By trying to achieve happiness from external objects we will not be successful. We have to recognise the importance of overcoming the unsuitable thoughts.

It is said in Buddhism that oneself is one's own protector. How do we protect ourselves? By overcoming unsuitable disturbing thoughts. Through overcoming these thoughts, at the time of death, we can die with a happy and peaceful mind. In this way, one will really have become one's own protector.

4.2.2.1.2 The actual way to take the essence

4.2.2.1.2.1 Training the mind in the stages of the path of the small capable being

4.2.2.1.2.1.1 The actual way of training in the motivation common to the being of small capacity

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.1 Generating the aspiration for happiness in the future life

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.1.1 Remembering death, becoming aware that one is not going to remain for a long time

4.2.2.1.1.1.1.1.2 The benefits of cultivating mindfulness of death

Last time we went through the disadvantages of not meditating on death and impermanence and today we have come to the outline of the benefits of meditating on death and impermanence. To meditate on death and impermanence is one of the most important meditations to do.

If one generates a really deep and real understanding of death and impermanence that arises from thinking about scriptural quotations and logical reasons, then for a person with even a minimum of Dharma understanding the following benefits ensue. If one arrives at the decision that one is going to die this very day, then that understanding will lessen one's craving for friends, possessions and so forth, because one will come to see these things as lacking any essence. Having a deep understanding that one will die today and that one cannot take friends or possessions to the next life one will see their lack of essence and give up grasping at them.

The conclusion of being high is that one will fall low; it is inevitable that if one is high that one will fall low, and the suffering of those who fall from high to low is very great. One can observe it time and again, that people who are very high, such as a prime minister, one year, are the next year in prison for various offences.

The conclusion of birth is death. The inevitable conclusion of being born is that one has to die.

The conclusion of meeting with others is that one will separate from them. It is inevitable that when we meet somebody we will also separate from that person sooner

¹ Disturbance of the subtle life-energy that manifest as profound mental disturbance and physical unwell being.

or later. This is a very common experience. Even if you have been together with a person for a long time, separation can occur very quickly.

The inevitable conclusion of having accumulated possessions is that one will be separated from them.

By recognising that all these things are inevitable, the thought of this life is reversed, and one will automatically give up grasping at this life. Such a person who has a deep understanding of death and impermanence will automatically give up grasping at this life and as a conclusion will automatically be happier. While a person may have the outer appearance of success and happiness, the reality is that if that person has strong grasping for the happiness of this life, deep down they are not really happy. Deep down they do not have the happiness they project to the outside. On the other hand, someone who has given up grasping at this life will experience a deep and satisfactory happiness and be able to experience happiness even though they may have very little.

To have little desire and contentment as advised by earlier practitioners does not mean that we need to wear poor clothing or live in a poor house. It means we should be content with what we have. The trick is to be able to be content with what one has, because as many great sages have said, there is no greater suffering than the suffering of being discontent with one's achievements. One may have a certain desire and work to achieve that desire, but then what happens is that one is not content with one's achievement. We cannot be happy with our achievement and enjoy it. Instead we have desire for more; we are dissatisfied with what we have and desire more. There is no greater suffering than that because one will never be happy.

So, we need to be able to practise contentment with what we have. This is the real meaning of being of little desire and having contentment. It does not mean that one needs to be poor. By reflecting on death and impermanence one comes to realise that the conclusion of meeting is to separate. It is inevitable that when things meet they have to separate. They are never meant to be together forever. Rather, they are meant to separate sooner or later. By reflecting on death and impermanence we will come to this conclusion naturally and it will be of great benefit to our mind because we are automatically able to stop grasping.

An Indian woman who came to Tara Institute asked me the reason for my happiness. She said: 'You're always so happy, why is that?' I told her: 'Well, I basically lost everything. I lost my country, I lost any type of possession that I might have had, also my family. When I came to India, I did not even have a bowl to drink tea and to eat from'. At first she was quite shocked, but after having thought a little bit about it, she had this insight and said: 'Now I know – it's because of not having attachment'. By my telling her my situation, she got something useful to think about.

Those who have a deep understanding of death and impermanence and even just a bit of understanding of the Dharma will be able to give up craving and grasping for

this life, and will feel greatly inspired to practise refuge and the six perfections. In this way, they will make their way towards their own liberation and also the liberation of others. What could possibly be of greater meaning than that?

One will come to recognise the senselessness of praise, gain, pleasing words, and so forth. Ordinarily, a great part of one's mind and life are consumed by wanting to achieve praise, avoid criticism, achieve gain, avoid loss, and so forth.

By recognising the lack of essence of praise, gain, nice words and so forth we can let these go and turn our mind towards the Dharma. We will take refuge, practise morality and engage in the other virtuous practices, accumulating the causes for liberation and enlightenment. By practising refuge and morality, we will accumulate many virtues, many causes for liberation and enlightenment. In this way we will fulfil our own potential as well as achieve the welfare of others. What could be of greater meaning than this?

The scriptures use an analogy to drive home the importance of the meditation on death and impermanence. They say that the best time to plough a field is in autumn – at least that's the case in Tibet! If the field is ploughed in autumn and left during winter under the snow, when it is planted in spring, the crop will grow much better than a field that is only ploughed after winter. Also, the greatest of all footprints is that of the elephant. Not only that, but an elephant has a wide gait and takes big steps that leave a deep imprint.

Likewise, the best of all recognitions is the recognition of death and impermanence; in dependence on the recognition of death and impermanence, the 'crop' of realisations can grow. If one 'ploughs' or prepares one's mind with the recognition of death and impermanence, the field of one's mind will become fertile, and the crop of the Dharma will grow there very well. Similarly, when we have recognition of death and impermanence, our footsteps along the path of the Dharma will be as wide and deep and long as the strides of an elephant.

The recognition of death and impermanence becomes a hammer that destroys the afflictions of the three realms such as ignorance and pride. When lamas step up on the throne they have to snap their fingers in order to remind themselves of impermanence. This is to counteract pride.

The recognition of death and impermanence counteracts ignorance, attachment and desire – it acts as the hammer that destroys the afflictions of the three realms as well as the negative and harmful actions that arise from those afflictions. Also, it is the door through which one achieves the different virtues and wholesome practices and actions instantaneously.

Next time, we can talk more about how meditating on impermanence is the door for all realisations and accomplishments and wholesome actions. For tonight, do you have a question?

Question: Do we lose our understandings when we die?

Answer: They continue to the next life in the form of

mental imprints. For example, if we were to again take a human rebirth in the next life, the seeds we planted in this life will ripen through our study and practice in the next. It will not happen completely without effort, but it will be easier.

We can observe that certain people find it very easy to do certain things, while others find it more difficult. If we meditate on love and compassion in this life, even though our love and compassion do not continue directly to the next life, their imprints go to the next life and in the next life it becomes easier to generate love and compassion, and the love and compassion that we generate will be stronger.

Question: Could I just ask what the English translation is for Om Mani Padme Hum?

Answer: There is no translation for *Om*. Om is just Om. The syllable Om is made up out of three letters – ah, oh and ma, which becomes aom or Om, and symbolises the enlightened body, speech and mind of Chenrezig. *Mani* means jewel. Chenrezig holds a jewel in two hands. The word Mani is Sanskrit. In Tibetan its norbu; in English it is jewel. *Padma* means lotus, but in the mantra it is *padme*, which means ‘that which has a lotus’, which refers to Chenrezig – Chenrezig is the one that holds the lotus. *Hum* symbolises the enlightened mind of Chenrezig.

Mani is the jewel that Chenrezig holds – you can see on the thanka (to the left of the altar in the gompa) that the upper hold a jewel, which symbolises the unification of method and wisdom. The lower right hand holds a rosary, and the lower left hand holds a flower. The rosary symbolises method and the flower symbolises wisdom.

Question: I was just wondering, how does virtue travel from one life to the next? How does our virtue find us in the next life?

Answer: It goes together with one’s mind. The power of one’s virtuous and non-virtuous karma is placed on the mindstream in the form of imprints or potentials, and they go together with the mind from this life to the next. One’s mind goes from this life to the next, and when it does the karmic imprints accompany it. One’s next life is determined by which karma ripens at the time of one’s death, and which karma ripens at the time of one’s death is determined by whether one has predominantly virtuous karma on one’s continuum, or non-virtuous karma. The stronger will ripen first.

Question: I have heard that at the moment of death, our last thought will determine what type of existence we will take.

Answer: It is the state of mind just before the breathing stops that determines which projecting karma will ripen to throw us into the next life. If it is a virtuous state of the mind at that time, one will have a good rebirth in the next life because good karma will ripen.

If one is a Dharma practitioner it is very important to have a virtuous mental state at that time. Also, if you are with people who are dying take care that they can die in a happy and peaceful way – after the moment of death it is really too late. After the breathing stops, it is not

possible to change the type of rebirth they will take.

We can recite the Shakyamuni Buddha mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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