
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual, we will spend some time in meditation. To begin, we sit in a comfortable, upright position. It is also important to generate a positive motivation for doing the practice. Even if we were to do a very short meditation, it will depend entirely on what motivation we have whether it turns into a virtuous act or not. Therefore it's very important to have the proper motivation.

As discussed previously, the purpose of meditation is to train the mind to be focused and not distracted by all the conceptual thoughts that arise. One may ask, "Why do we need to bring our minds inward, focus inward?" To answer that question let us consider how our mind, when it's left in its normal state, is continuously distracted by many thoughts that arise. It is like a continuous stream of different thoughts just arise and then change into another thought and just leading us to so many different ideas and thoughts throughout the day. Because all the disturbing thoughts that arise in the mind are based on gross, worldly, conceptual thoughts the culmination of these thoughts is an experience of feeling sad, completely bewildered, not knowing what to do or feeling frustrated. There are times when we feel we don't have any direction in life and we feel a bit lost and unhappy. We could call losing one's goal in life, losing all one's hope, feeling very down, mild depression and that can lead to severe depression.

It may seem that these states of mind occur out of the blue and just happen suddenly. In fact they are a result of a continuously distracted mind and trying to solve our problems by letting the mind focus on many worldly objects out there. When we find that we end up feeling lost, completely hopeless and so forth, it is those sorts of minds that have created this unhappiness in our mind and are why we feel uncomfortable. This leads to disturbing thoughts and disturbing actions that follow.

There are, however, times when we do think about something positive. Even when we feel a bit down and lost, if we direct our thoughts in a positive way we can start to feel energised and uplifted again. It depends on where we direct our thoughts. If we direct them in a positive way, think about the potential we have and recall the teachings, the mind can lift up and we can feel courageous again. What we are attempting to do in meditation is to minimise and eventually to completely free the mind from disturbing, gross conceptual thoughts and generate those positive thoughts that lift us up and can help to lift others up.

It is important to distinguish those gross, conceptual thought from positive conceptual thoughts.

Positive conceptual thoughts are something that can be beneficial in our life. When we do a contemplative meditation we are keeping our mind focused on one particular object at a time. When we do an analytical meditation we do not completely discard all conceptual thoughts. The distinction has to be made between disturbing gross conceptual thoughts and positive conceptual thoughts. We discard gross disturbing conceptual thoughts and generate positive conceptual thoughts.

We may also notice that sometimes when there is a difficult situation we might feel completely discouraged and completely lost. Yet there might be other times, depending on our attitude and how we look at the situation, that we would acknowledge the difficulty of the situation but we may develop a sense of encouragement thinking, "Well, I will have to go through this, it is something worthwhile. Even though it's difficult and even though it requires a lot of effort, I will put my energy and effort into this and I will accomplish what I need to accomplish".

There are times when even though the situation may still be difficult it actually instils within us a sense of encouragement and determination to actually accomplish the deed. The same situation may appear disastrous to one person whilst another person may see it as something advantageous, and useful for their practice. We can see how this depends not entirely on the external situation itself but rather on our attitude and how we deal with it. Those positive thoughts that we call self-encouragement, determination to succeed and so forth are something that we need to develop and increase. External difficulties and situations can give us encouragement. We should take this as an example and use it for our inner development that, in this case to meditation.

In attempting to meditate, we might experience a lot of difficulty, particularly trying to maintain our focus. Bringing our mind inward from external distractions is something that is not easily done. We might find it is actually very difficult. If, as we face that difficulty, we leave meditation aside and think it's too difficult and don't try further, we will not accomplish the great advantages and benefits of meditation. When one attempts to meditate and one faces difficulties trying to maintain one's focus, one should not lose one's determination. One should see that difficulty as a message to further encourage one. "Because it so difficult to train my mind, I must definitely make efforts to train my mind to overcome the obstacles and thus achieve the benefits of meditation". The difficulties should give us more encouragement and determination to further develop ourselves.

Having mentioned the benefits of meditation, we will now attempt to do a few minutes of meditation. We bring our mind inward and distance our mind from external distractions, the gross conceptual thoughts. At this initial stage we train our mind to maintain focus on one particular object. Choosing the breath to focus on is most useful for beginners. By keeping our attention completely

on the breath, we train our mind, for a few minutes, to be familiar with focussing inward. *Pause for meditation.*

I have to bring you out of your samadhi, your deep meditation now.

As beginners, it is completely natural that our mind is distracted and it is hard to maintain our focus for a long time. Because it is difficult to maintain our focus for a long time, the great masters advice is to begin by keeping our focus on the object for a very short time. Initially even if it's just for a minute, keep one's attention completely focused on the object for that minute.

If one is able to achieve that, to keep the mind focused on the object for a minute, be satisfied with that for the time being and continue attempting to meditate for that duration. In that way, we very gradually build up our span of attention and focus on the object. Otherwise, if we attempt to try to achieve a focus of long duration in the beginning when we don't have much training we would find that the mind keeps getting distracted.

If we insist on keeping to a certain time limit, "I've decided to meditate for about ten to fifteen minutes", and the mind is not able to focus well and we stubbornly keep on trying to bring the mind back to the object of focus over and over again, it will not bring a lot of result or fruit in that attempt. In fact, the result would be that one would keep getting annoyed that the mind is continuously distracted. Attempting to meditate in that way will lead us to developing an aversion towards meditation. When we think about meditation there will be a block and the thought, "Oh, meditation, that means just struggling again and again with my mind trying to keep it focused". It would feel an undesirable thing to do. Whereas if you train the mind to be satisfied with even a small duration of time one will be able to naturally and very comfortably extend the focus to a long duration of time. There are great meditators who can meditate for over an hour with great joy in their mind, great peace in their mind. It's all very natural. That is a result of having trained initially in very short durations.

It is said that nothing is unachievable or unaccomplishable with familiarisation. Like anything else that one wishes to accomplish and achieve we have to continuously apply some effort to be successful. It is the same with meditation. If we put in a manageable effort in the beginning then, as the mind becomes more familiar in focusing on an object, the duration of one's focus on the object will naturally lengthen. Therefore it is very important to take a correct approach and apply the right technique from the very beginning of one's meditation. There are cases where people put some effort into meditation and think that they are using the right effort and technique and they think, "I'm meditating. I've meditated for a long time. I've meditated for many years", but all the while their technique might not have been a proper technique. When they reach a stage where they haven't achieved anything they will develop a complete aversion towards meditation and say, "Oh, this is all rubbish, I've tried meditating, it doesn't work". It might generate an aversion towards meditation.

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

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.2 Relying on the methods for achieving happiness in future lives

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.2.1 Developing the faith of conviction in karma and its effects.

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.2.1.1 Thinking about the Law of Cause and Effect in general

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.2.1.1.2 Reflecting on the individual divisions

We come now to the part of the text dealing with the difference between the heaviness and lightness of karmas.

This is explained in two subdivisions.

- 1) The weights of the ten paths of nonvirtuous action.
- 2) The criteria for powerful actions.

Firstly it goes into the heaviness and lightness of the ten non-virtuous karmas in particular and then the second subdivision talks about how actions become powerful.

We have talked extensively about the ten non-virtuous karmas. These are the three relating to the physical body, the four relating to speech, and the three relating to mind. The three relating to the body are killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. The four relating to speech are lying, divisive speech, harsh speech and idle gossip or senseless speech. And the three relating to mind are covetousness, harmful intent and wrong views. The ten virtues are the exact opposite of the ten non-virtues and are called the ten virtuous deeds.

Asanga talks about six different types of weighty karmas, in his treatise *Levels of Yogic deeds*.

The first of the six can be translated as conditioning and refers to the intensity of the three poisons in one's mind at the time of engaging in the action. For example, if an action such as killing is done with very intense delusions in the mind, whether it's anger or attachment or ignorance, it would be a heavy or weighty karma of killing.

The second weighty factor is habituation. When an act, whether it is positive or negative, is done on a continuous basis because of one's habit, that act becomes a weighty act. That karma becomes a heavy karma.

The third factor that gives an action positive or negative weight is its nature. It explains here that among the three physical and four vocal actions, the former ones are weightier and among the three mental actions the latter are weightier than the former. To explain this more specifically. The three negative actions relating to the physical body are killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. Killing is weightier. By its very nature the negative action of killing is much weightier, meaning it has a heavier negative karma, than stealing. Likewise stealing has heavier negative karma than sexual misconduct.

The degree of heaviness or lightness is in relation to how much harm it brings to the other. When we think about it, it makes sense that the most prized possession that anyone would have is his or her life. There's nothing more precious than one's own life. Therefore to rob or to take someone's life, any being's life, is said to be the heaviest negative karma. In comparison, taking a possession of someone else is a little bit lighter negative karma. Likewise sexual misconduct is even lighter than that by comparison. Similarly of the four negativities of speech the latter ones are lighter than the earlier ones. Lying has heavier negative karma than slander or divisive speech. Slander or divisive speech is heavier than harsh speech, and that is heavier than idle gossip. The latter ones are lighter in comparison to the earlier ones. This is again in relation to how much harm it brings to the other.

However with the non-virtues or negativities of mind the latter ones are heavier than the former ones. The last one, wrong views, has heavier negative karma than harmful intention, and harmful intention is heavier than covetousness.

The fourth factor is the basis. Negative karma is either heavier or lighter depending on the basis.

When one engages in positive or negative actions in relation to holy objects such as the Buddhas, the Dharma and one's teachers, or kind objects such as one's parents the action becomes heavier than others.

The fifth factor is fixation on incompatible factors. This means, for example, that as long as one lives, if one completely takes up non-virtuous actions and do not cultivate virtue even once. That is an example of fixation on incompatible factors. Throughout one's life one does not, either intentionally or unknowingly, engage in any virtue, but only engages in non-virtue. That kind of negative action would naturally become very heavy. On the positive side that would also be true. If one engages only in virtue, that would be heavy virtuous karma. This particularly includes not applying any of the antidotes for overcoming the negative actions. If one engages in negative actions and does not apply the antidote for overcoming, purifying, the negative action it becomes heavy.

The sixth factor is called eradication of unfavourable factors. This means having eliminated a group of non-virtues you become free from attachment and cultivate virtuous actions. That is the opposite of the earlier factor.

Nagarjuna gives a summary of all these factors in his treatise called "*A Friendly Letter*". It says,

The five types of virtuous and non-virtuous,

Actions arising out of persistence, obsession and a lack of remedy,

And the principle foundations of virtue are huge;

Among them, strive to cultivate virtue.

This summarises all the earlier factors. Arising out of persistence is conditioning. Obsession is the habituation or lack of remedy. The principle foundations of virtue are

included in that. Therefore they are huge, meaning that they can become heavy. Among these, one should strive to cultivate virtue and avoid the non-virtuous.

At this point, if anyone has questions, I'm willing to answer those questions. Otherwise we can continue with four remaining factors. *No questions.*

We have covered the weightiness of the ten paths of non-virtuous action. Then there are the criteria for powerful actions. There are actions that can be powerful in four different ways. The first one is in terms of the recipient, the second is in terms of support, the third is in terms of objects and the fourth is in terms of attitude.

The first one, which is powerful in terms of the recipient, or basis, is similar to what we covered earlier. To be more specific. The nature of the recipient makes the karma more powerful. The objects are the Buddhas, enlightened beings because these objects themselves are powerful. The second category are objects that have been kind to one. Powerful objects that have been kind to one would include one's own Guru, one's teacher who teaches us the spiritual path and shows us unmistakable ways to engage in a spiritual or the Dharma path. So such a teacher, or Guru, would be extremely kind to oneself. Any actions done in relation to such a kind teacher would be extremely heavy; positively or negatively.

Objects who have been kind to one include one's parents. It is important for us to really consider how our parents have been extremely kind to us. Of course it is hard, sometimes, to automatically think about the kindness of one's parents, especially if one feels that one's parents have been not skilful in raising us. The reality is that, regardless of their limitations and how they have raised us, they have been kind to us. In fact many people have related their experiences to me and said that it only occurs how kind a parent is when they become a parent themselves. That seems to be an experience that many people have. It dawns on them how incredibly kind our parents were to us in just bringing us up.

It may be the case that our parents have caused us some harm or what we have interpreted as harm. The problem here is that we focus only on that. We only focus on the harms and then use that as a reason why we don't get along with our parents. If we only focus on the harm it will naturally increase. If we use that as our measure, our focus, and constantly think about the harmful things that our parents have done to us then naturally our conclusion would be that our parents are evil.

But if you think about the positive side, and if we sincerely compare the two, the benefit and the harm, and we go back to the time we were in our mother's womb, and after we were born and so forth, if we look from all the way back, we would find that there are many more times that our parents have been kind to us than the small harm that they have given us. The kindness they have shown to us will definitely outweigh the harm that they have inflicted on us.

Now it may be, in very, very rare cases that some parents, for whatever reason, may have harmed their children in

some way. But in a general sense, in a normal environment, we would find that kindness definitely outweighs harm. It is very important that we look into that sincerely with an unbiased, honest mind and start to see it in its actual form. Then we can slowly develop a natural, and real appreciation towards the kindness our parents have shown us. In this way a natural feeling of fondness and closeness will develop towards one's parents.

I emphasise over and over again, and I feel very strongly with some experience myself, that a basis for a harmonious life is dependent on a harmonious family. If there's a good relationship between parents and children and the parents try their best to show kindness and bring up their children in a kind, skilful way, and the children begin to appreciate and respect their parents, that sort of good connection is the basis for what we call a harmonious, happy life in a worldly sense. I really feel that is the basis. That's why I cannot overemphasise it.

If we were to use a set of scales and on one side of the scales we put the harm that our parents have inflicted on us and on the other the benefit, the kindness that they have shown us would definitely outweigh the harm. The result of such a contemplation, looking honestly into the kindness that parents have shown us and the harm, which is insignificant in comparison, would be that we would begin to realise how kind our parents have been. One should then to try to remind oneself of that and think about it often. When we become more familiar with the notion of how kind our parents have been that will naturally override any hard feelings that one may have had previously. If one is always focusing on the harmful side it overrides the greater benefits and we don't see that and we don't acknowledge that. We should attempt to have a realistic approach where the kindness that our parents have shown us overrides the small harm. If there has been any harm, a very small insignificant harm, it's overridden when we have a real, honest appreciation in our mind of our parent's kindness. This is, in fact, a way of training the mind, a way to look into many other similar situations.

When someone approached me and related about how it was very difficult for them to appreciate the kindness of their parents I discussed it with them and said, "Well, when someone offers you a meal would you call such a person a very generous person? Do you remember them as very generous and kind because they have taken you out to a meal?" They said yes. I continued, "You can accept that? You do appreciate that? So consider how many meals your parents have given you – lunches, dinners and breakfast. Not once and twice, but numerous times, for weeks and months and years. If you go back and think about that, maybe you can start to appreciate your parents more". When he got back to me later he said that really helped him to see it in a different way.

The next powerful action is in terms of the support. This would refer to actions of a person who has taken any of the vows. The virtue or non-virtue of someone who has taken any specific vows, which is the support, is heavier than someone who has not taken any vows. Because of

this factor there is the practices of taking what is called the precepts. There are certain kind of vows, like the one day- lay person's vows, and the eight Mahayana precepts. These are precepts that one can take on special occasions. One may take such vows on specific auspicious days, or on a monthly basis, on a full moon and new moon. Any virtue that one accumulates during that day, becomes much more powerful on the basis of having taken vows.

The next one which falls in the category, is in terms of objects. The objects here, refers to objects of offerings. There are different types of offerings one can make, material offerings and offerings of one's practice. Offerings of one's practice is said to be much more powerful. Therefore if one engages in practice, which means following the advice that is given by one's teachers, one creates more powerful karma than just making material offerings to one's teacher. Also it is said that amongst the different types of generosity, giving others spiritual advice or Dharma teachings, is of much higher value because of the great benefit it brings to the other.

The last powerful action is in terms of attitude. This is the attitude one has when performing the action. When one engages in an action, depending on what kind of attitude one has, the action can become powerful. On the negative side, when engaging non-virtues, if there is a very strong attitude of anger, or very strong attachment, or very deep rooted ignorance, that would lead to very powerful negative actions. The teachings specifically mentions that anger is a very powerful negative force. In a moment of anger one can create very heavy negative karma, which can destroy eons of positive karma.

We can conclude here for this evening. Before we end we will again engage in a few minutes of meditation. This time as we sit in an upright, comfortable position, we bring our mind inward and as we recite the mantra of Buddha Shakyamuni. We keep our focus completely on the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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