
The Condensed Lam Rim

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It would be good to spend some time in meditation. It is important to sit in an appropriate posture, sitting straight. Sitting in a relaxed posture is emphasised because physical strain would cause the mind to be distracted, and that would not be a very good meditation.

For example, if people who are not accustomed to sitting cross-legged attempt to do so, they may strain their knees and cause a lot of pain. The proper posture for such individuals would be sitting on a chair, which is much more comfortable.

After sitting in an appropriate comfortable posture, before we engage in meditation it is important to check our motivation, which means checking our intention for doing the meditation. It is extremely important to make sure that we have a good intention. According to the explanations [in the texts], we should do meditation as a means to acquaint our mind in a positive way. As well as developing a positive frame of mind, we also meditate to acquire qualities. Some people may feel, 'I already have qualities and a positive attitude, so meditation may not be necessary for me'.

However, the reference to qualities here is more specific – it means the qualities we get from having acquired spiritual knowledge. As mentioned, some people may feel, 'I already have knowledge, so there's no need to engage in meditation to gain further knowledge'. It's true that we have all gained knowledge from a worldly perspective since we began to go to school, from kindergarten up to this stage in our life.

But has the worldly knowledge we have gained in this way contributed to us having a really peaceful and contented mind? When we investigate and analyse our life and see how we have used this knowledge, we may discover that the knowledge we have gained so far has contributed mostly to increasing the delusions or negative states of mind such as desire, indulgence, or pride. With the knowledge we have gained, we might feel more pride and feel superior to others. Furthermore, we may have developed feelings of competitiveness towards others, or the knowledge we have gained may contribute to feeling anger or hatred and so forth. So when we look at how the worldly knowledge has been used we find that it has contributed to a lot of delusions in the mind.

We can look into the differences between those who have acquired mere worldly knowledge to sustain themselves and those who have spent their life gaining spiritual knowledge through whatever faith and religion they may follow.

When we look at people who have gained significant worldly success – wealth and so forth – if we look closely into their lives to see whether they are really contented and happy, we would find many examples of successful wealthy individuals not leading a happy, contented life. On the other hand, there are many examples of people who lead a spiritual life, sincerely following whatever faith or religion they practise, who have gained a relatively happy, content

life. Many true spiritual seekers may not have a lot of worldly gains. They may not have a fancy dwelling, riches and wealth, but their mind is more contented and happy.

What we can learn from that observation is that, first; we should recognise that we already have sufficient material gain to survive in this world. But if we notice that we are lacking a real true sense of happiness, peace and contentment, we should try to divert our energy into pursuing real spiritual knowledge and not put our entire energy into pursuing only worldly gains. As we can see from the examples above, pursuing worldly gain does not give real contentment and happiness, and the lesson is that we should slowly put some energy into developing our mind through meditation.

You do not need to follow a particular religion to benefit from meditation. Meditation really means slowly working at eliminating the negative states of mind and cultivating the positive states of mind, by identifying the positive states of mind and cultivating them.

If we again look at the differences between those who pursue worldly gain and those who pursue spiritual knowledge, when an individual with a purely worldly outlook sees someone else doing well in business, whatever field they are interested in, what would be their immediate reaction? For an ordinary person with an ordinary worldly outlook, when they see someone being more successful than themselves they would naturally feel jealous, rather than feeling happy and joyful. Therefore worldly gain, worldly knowledge contributes to developing negative states of mind such as jealousy, which in turn harms one's own mind and makes one suffer.

In contrast, when those leading a spiritual life see someone else doing well and progressing, their attitude would be one of joy and respect. When they see someone doing well at developing themselves spiritually, they would naturally feel great joy and respect for the other person.

Different delusions arise when we are completely immersed in a worldly attitude. But once we develop a positive mind through meditation, it brings about more calmness and peace in one's own mind and thus to others. This is where meditation benefits us. So we engage in meditation as a means to minimise the disturbed mind, the mind that is full of different concepts and delusions, and bring it inward, so that it is more centred.

In the practice of meditation, we learn to minimise the disturbing attitudes in the mind such as the many different disturbing attitudes or emotions that arise when we feel depressed, paranoid, or have unrealistic ideas that we fail to realise and thus end up feeling rather depressed and frustrated. There is also paranoia or fear about what could happen in the future when nothing has happened yet; even contemplating that contributes to fear and insecurity in the mind.

We can name many different disturbing attitudes that arise in the mind based on irrational thinking and assumptions. All these thoughts and ideas disturb the peace in our mind. In certain circumstances, some difficulties may present us with a little bit of a challenge and may help us solve bigger problems. If that is the case, it is worthwhile enduring and pursuing certain difficulties, ideas, plans or feelings of frustration if this is contributing to solving a bigger problem.

Otherwise irrational thoughts and paranoia do not have any benefit whatsoever now or in the future; these disturbing thoughts and emotions are really not useful for oneself or for

others. These are the disturbing emotions that we attempt to overcome through meditation. When the mind is more contented, relaxed and clearer, it is free from disturbance, and whatever activity we engage in will be much more fruitful.

If we can see the benefit of a calm and peaceful mind compared to a disturbed mind, that is a sufficient reason to pursue and engage in meditation.

I am saying this to give you a guideline or basis to work upon, but in fact each of you have the analytical wisdom or knowledge that allows you to distinguish between what is beneficial or useful and what is harmful for you. With this innate analytical wisdom, the teaching or advice serves as a means to remind us to use that analytical wisdom and to really analyse for ourselves what is useful. Having recognised what attitudes, behaviour, and so forth are useful, we adopt those and after we have recognised what is harmful for us, we make an attempt to initially minimise and slowly to avoid and completely shun those attitudes and behaviours.

If we don't use our analytical wisdom and just let our mind be influenced by whatever thoughts and emotions arise, because our mind is quite vulnerable, it will be influenced by negative thoughts. The real danger occurs when negative states of mind appear to us as being useful; the more we cultivate those negative states of mind, the more it will harm our own peace of mind and harm others.

Therefore we must be careful not to be influenced by the negative states of mind. The only way to do this is differentiating between what thoughts are beneficial and what are harmful and, as mentioned earlier, to attempt to cultivate the positive states of mind, which is the purpose of meditation.

If we pursue meditation and live our life along these guidelines, any meditation we attempt becomes an actual means to overcome the delusions. The teachings mention that what we should gain from meditation is a more subdued mind. This means that, having engaged in meditation, if we have applied the right technique, it should overcome the disturbing states of mind and, as a natural consequence; our mind will become more subdued.

To give specific examples, if we know that we have had a short temper and used to easily get angry in our earlier life, having come into contact with meditation techniques and attempted to meditate, if we find that gradually through a process of meditation, anger is not as strong as previously and that we are less angry now, that would be a positive result of meditation. Or if we had noticed that in an earlier part of life we were very proud and that due to that having meditated we find that the pride has lessened, we could see that as a benefit. Likewise with jealousy, if we used to be very easily envious and jealous of others and having meditated we find that the jealousy has reduced and that we are more joyful of others' success, that would be a good result for oneself, wouldn't it? In this way, we investigate and ask ourselves 'if meditation can actually reduce delusions in the mind, wouldn't it then be a benefit for us?'

Now, we will take some time to actually engage in meditation. The initial technique we use for meditation is to focus our mind on our breath: we use our own breath as an object to focus on. We withdraw our mind from all other thoughts for the time being, leaving everything aside, feel determined for a few minutes to focus only on the breath. We try to maintain our focus on the natural inflow and

outflow of our breath.

As we initially direct our attention to the breath, we might notice that the mind starts to get distracted, again through habituation, and we might find that the mind wants to go and follow those thoughts. Here again we use our determination to remind ourselves that we are now here to just focus on the breath – there is nothing more important. Think that, 'I just need to keep my focus on my breath' and even if it is only for a few minutes, if you can maintain your focus on the breath, it will naturally help all the disturbing thoughts and emotions in the mind to subside. Even after a few minutes' meditation, one might notice that the mind becomes calm and restful.

So the actual technique is to maintain that focus for as long as possible, even if initially it is only for a short duration. Just focus on the breath. Remembering this technique, we engage in the 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

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.2.1.3. The way one engages in virtue

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.2.1.3.2. The way to train by means of the four powers

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.2.1.3.2.3. The four powers

4.2.2.1.2.1.1.2.1.3.2.3.2. The power of the opponent force

We have been covering the four opponent powers that serve as a means to purify negative karma.

We have been covering the second opponent power, which is the power of opponent force. Within the specific means of applying the opponent force, there are six specific ways to engage in particular practices that serve as opponent forces. We have covered the first three, and we came to the fourth point of the practice of relying on the making of images of the buddhas, such as statues, paintings, stupas etc.

What is specified in the teaching is that if the commissioning of statues of the Buddha or reliquaries, such as stupas, is done with faith, this can serve as a means for purifying negative karma. But if one actually makes images of the Buddha with a worldly concern, such as for reputation or monetary gain, that does not serve as a means of purification.

The fifth practice is to make offerings to the holy images such as statues of buddhas, stupas and so forth. For those who are already engaged in making offerings, it is good to be mindful of the practice and remind oneself that making offerings on one's altar on a daily basis can serve as a means of purification. To be mindful of that will help to make the actual offering a much more powerful practice.

For those who may not have engaged in the actual practice of making offerings on altars, another means of engaging in a similar practice is to be generous towards others, by making any kind of offering. That also can serve as a means of purification.

The sixth purifying practice that serves as an opponent force is repeating the names of the buddhas. Of all the different deities and buddhas, there are specific ones that serve as

particular practice for purification, such as the names of the Thirty-Five Buddhas and the seven Medicine Buddhas – we should really say eight, as on top of the seven Medicine Buddhas, we add on the name of Buddha Shakyamuni, making a total of eight. Reciting the names of these Buddhas becomes a very powerful means to purify. As the teaching says here, even memorising them or hearing them is a means to purify negative karma.

With these explanations we can come to understand that reciting the names of these buddhas becomes a very powerful practice. For people who are caring for sick people or animals, it is a good means to help them. If one recites these names with love and compassion, that will help not only oneself but the other person who hears it as well.

As to the question of the benefit of reciting these names, I can relate one or two instances from my own experiences to confirm that there is definitely some benefit. I was asked to visit an elderly person whose son was coming here regularly. The son made a request to me on behalf of his mother to go and visit her. She was elderly and in the last stages of her life. Apparently she had not been so joyful and happy in the previous days, weeks, maybe months, but on the particular day I visited her, she apparently had later mentioned that she was very happy and joyful. During my visit, I recited the names of the 35 Buddhas, Eight Medicine Buddhas and so forth, and it seemed to have left a very good positive impact on her to make her feel joyful.

Another time I visited another elderly woman who was in the last stages of her life and in fact soon after I visited her she passed away. During my visit, I recited the names of these Buddhas and she showed clear signs of being very relaxed and very joyful. This was just a few days before she passed away. They were both not really known to be Buddhist, yet seemed to have appreciated and benefited from that.

These were incidents where the people actually benefited from the Buddhist mantras. However if you know that someone has strong faith in a particular tradition or deity such as God, at the crucial moment of their life when they are about to pass away, you can remind them of that particular god or faith and help them recite verses they are familiar with, or remind them of the good qualities of that faith. This will definitely help to soothe their mind.

This goes for every tradition and every religion. For a person of a particular faith, it will be most useful for them to be reminded of their faith and their gods before they pass away, because at that very last stage, when everything else fails, what seems to really bring comfort to the mind is the strong faith they have had during their life. This will bring consolation and ease in their mind.

So, before we conclude, we could have one question.

Question: I have been reading some Buddhist books and it makes a lot of sense to me, however I was wondering if there was any way of knowing what level I am at. Would you be able to advise me?

Answer: It would be hard for me to determine this. That really depends on yourself. One has to gauge one's own level, where one reaches or where one is at. Reading books and so forth can definitely be very helpful and one can learn a lot from that and also use that as a basis to further understand and learn more.

For some people, reading a book and getting some information is a consolation for the mind and they feel content with that. That is fine too. If you need to progress, you have to slowly work on understanding more, based on

what you have read. As you understand more, you begin to notice in your own mind what kind of level you have reached.

The most useful attitude to adopt when reading books or when receiving a teaching is to try and extract what is most useful for oneself from the reading, or from listening to a teaching. If there are certain points that one does not understand or that seem a bit too much to accept right now, rather than developing a negative attitude, saying, 'I disagree with that, that must be just all rubbish', just leave it aside for the time being. Think instead, 'I don't understand this yet, so I'll just leave it for the time being. I will use what is useful for me now.' This will contribute towards enriching your understanding in a positive way and prevent you from developing a negative attitude.

The reason I emphasise this attitude is that it ensures that one does not develop a negative attitude, but leaves the mind open to learning and adopting what one can now and leaving the rest as something one does not understand at the moment. Because one hasn't developed a negative attitude, later on as one further reads and develops, those things that seemed either difficult or quite senseless in the beginning, start to make sense. Then one can really benefit from earlier ideas that didn't seem to be useful.

Some people have actually told me that when they came to teachings in earlier years, they would take note of everything that was said. At that stage and at that time, all the things they wrote down didn't seem to make much sense, they couldn't understand, but nevertheless they had written it down. Later on, after a few years of pursuing continuous study, when they looked back at their notes, those things that seemed totally senseless started to make a lot of sense and they thought, 'Now I understand what was being explained then'.

Question: I have understood from the teachings that the love expressed by ordinary people is mostly worldly love. How can one distinguish between real love and worldly love?

Answer: To explain the difference, we need to look at how the love manifesting within us, is felt and expressed. First one looks at how love develops in one's mind, how it comes about, and which objects it is associated with. When we analyse it, as the teachings describe, the worldly love that we have towards others is naturally expressed in relation to how the object appears to oneself. You have love for something that appears nice in relation to you, that which is close to you. The attitude of love develops in relation to someone who is close to you, such as your mother, your father, husband/wife, children etc. It's always in relation to 'me'. Therefore, as described in the teachings, if it is a love that is expressed using one self as a reason to feel that love, then is worldly love or attachment.

The kind of love in relation to oneself is called 'love that is expressed with self-grasping'. Because it comes from a self-grasping attitude, what we call love is mixed with attachment.

The nature of love that is mixed with attachment is such that, as long as the person or object seems to be useful or beneficial to me, I will love them. But when the object of that attachment changes, one's attitude towards the original object changes; or if that other person is not good to one, then that which we call love is suddenly gone. There is no more love there.

To develop what is called real, unconditional, or divine love, the attitude is completely contrary to that. To develop true

love, one uses the other as a reason for developing the attitude of affection. That means thinking of the other's suffering: 'Because the other is lacking true happiness and is in need for my affection, help and so forth, for that reason I will extend my affection towards them and do what I can for them'. So this love is not in relation to oneself as a reason but using the other's situation to develop affection. That becomes a very stable and good foundation of unconditional love, which should be cultivated.

Question: As the teaching mentioned, making of images of the buddhas, such as statues, can be a purification practice. My question is, can making images of wrathful deities also become a practice of purification?

Answer: As long as it is a statue of an enlightened being, whether in a peaceful or wrathful aspect, there is equal benefit, and it serves as an antidote for overcoming negativity.

Of course again that has to be based on faith and understanding. If it is a wrathful deity, one has to understand the implications and ramifications of why that aspect of an enlightened being is portrayed. In what way does that serve to benefit sentient beings? If one has that understanding in mind, the faith naturally is there. Because of one's understanding, one has a strong faith.

So constructing images with that faith and understanding can be a purification practice. If one does not have that understanding, then of course it is difficult.

Question: Not everyone may understand the significance of a wrathful deity?

Answer: It is in fact for that reason one needs to maintain some secrecy, because not everyone can understand right away. Actually even for individual practice, those deity practices and meditations should be done in secrecy to gain benefit, so that one can then help others.

Question: My understanding is that the Buddha always taught with an open hand, not holding anything back?

Answer: The Buddha teaches those who are capable of understanding, who have the mental capacity and disposition to be able to understand that teaching. The Buddha teaches everything with an open hand, but for those who are not ready for a particular level of teaching, it does not serve the purposes of that individual at that time.

The procedure of doing deity practices, such as those of wrathful deities, is first to develop a basic understanding of the Buddha's teaching, which is developing renunciation. Then based on renunciation, one develops bodhicitta, which is the altruistic wish to achieve enlightenment. Based on this, one develops the wisdom realising emptiness. With those bases, then it is said that one is ready to practise Tantra.

Having developed bodhicitta, which is the wish to become enlightened for the sake of all sentient beings, one then develops a very strong, intense longing to become enlightened as soon as possible so that one can help other sentient beings. For those who have that very strong longing to achieve that wish as soon as possible, it is said that Buddha gave the teachings of Tantra, which is a means to achieve enlightenment.

Question: I was wondering if there is any guideline for helping us to make the right choice. Like this evening, I was torn between staying at home and reading a story to my daughter, and coming here for the teaching.

Answer: There is no specific guideline, but one needs to use one's ability to weigh the situation and the circumstances. If

your daughter would be totally unhappy and felt abandoned and left alone, it would have been a good choice to stay with her, because again immediately you are helping someone. For the long term benefit however, you have taken the opportunity to come here to learn meditation and learn something about Buddhism, which is a means to develop oneself to become a better human being. If one could achieve that, it would not only merely benefit oneself, but it is a means to ultimately benefit others. So if one's motivation is pure and clear, of course coming here and learning can also serve as a means to benefit others. However one must not neglect one's immediate responsibilities as well.

It is important to consider that having an opportunity to study and practice should in no way be underestimated, because it is a means to develop a real sense of wellbeing and peace in one's mind. As a result one can be of benefit and help others. What I am saying is not to use the earlier situation as an excuse not to come.

Your dilemma reminds me of when I first came to the monastery. I was 16 years old when I left my home town in eastern Tibet to come to central Tibet, to Sera Monastery in Lhasa. When I left my home town in eastern Tibet – it was a long journey to Lhasa in those days – I left with an intention to study for three years and then go back to my home town where my parents were. So after spending three years in the monastery, my Mum started to send messages to the monastery saying that it was time to come back home.

However my teacher in Sera monastery encouraged me to stay on and study until I completed the whole course of study and became a geshe, which is a doctorate level degree in Buddhist philosophy. The dilemma was whether I should go back home and be with my parents or stay and study in the monastery. After thinking about what was more beneficial, I decided to follow my teacher's advice. So I decided to stay on in the monastery and complete the studies.

While at that time my parents and my Mum may have felt uncomfortable about me not going back, later on they acknowledged that that was the best choice and they really appreciated that I had continued to study and benefited from the study.

I have many such stories from my life, times of difficulties, but I won't have time to go through them, it would also bring tears to your eyes. There were of course times of great joy too, but we don't have time to relate that now.

Before we conclude for the evening, it is good to spend a few minutes in contemplation. Bring the mind inward and focus on Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra which we will recite. So this time we focus on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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