
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual, it is useful to spend sometime in meditation. For that purpose, we can sit in a relaxed but upright posture.

Setting the motivation for meditation practice is also important. This basically means considering the purpose of doing the action. Why is one doing this action? When we talk about motivation, it is a means to check up the reason why we are about to do an action before we engage in it. We find that there are different motivations in relation to different individuals. Just as with any action, the outcome depends on the individual's motivation, which will bring about a different outcome for the same action.

To put it in a nutshell, we could say that the purpose of meditation is to secure happiness or joy in our mind; to augment whatever happiness and joy we have already attained.

From our own life experience, we find that our mind regularly fluctuates between both happy and unhappy states. However, we may find that the happy states of mind do not last long, whereas unhappy, frustrated states of mind last much longer. We may experience a happy state of mind due to external conditions or internal causes – both factors can contribute. Likewise, with an unhappy state of mind, external conditions can serve as a condition for us have an unhappy state of mind, in addition to the main causes, which lie within us. In either case, whether external conditions or internal causes trigger the happy or unhappy state of mind, we find that the unhappy, frustrated, disturbed state of mind will last much longer.

It would be wonderful if we could gradually reverse this situation, so that our happy states of mind were more durable and lasted longer, and our unhappy states of mind were less durable and did not last long – eventually being overcome altogether. If we could actually achieve that, it would really transform our life.

If we ask ourselves, 'Is that possible?' we will find that, as explained in the teachings, it is definitely possible.

After seeing that it is possible to achieve a stable happy state of mind, we must then look into what causes the mind to be happy or unhappy. As mentioned earlier, to a certain extent external circumstances sometimes serve as a condition for us to feel unhappy or frustrated. But when we really analyse the situation, we come to slowly realise that the main factor that disturbs our mind lies within us – our attitude and how we interpret things. This is really the main cause for us to feel unhappy. If we really try to look inward and analyse what kind of mental attitude we have, we begin to slowly realise how this attitude affects the feelings and emotions arising in the mind and contributes to our happy or unhappy state of mind.

To summarise the main points, if we have a kind and gentle attitude within ourselves, this will definitely contribute to our general sense of wellbeing. If we have a kind and gentle approach to ourselves and others, it will naturally contribute to us having a good attitude and thus contribute to a happy state of mind. Whereas if we have negative, unkind, unjust, thoughts, this would naturally taint our attitude, which would also be negative and contribute to an unhappy state of mind. This is something we will come to realise when we look inward and investigate our mind.

Most of us, however, are quite used to looking at external circumstances to explain how we feel. We are quite used to looking outside to seek the external causes that make us feel unhappy or happy. Because our focus has mainly been outward, it is easy for us to blame external conditions when things goes wrong. But when we really start to analyse our mind and begin to realise that the main causes for a happy or unhappy state of mind lie within us, we begin to feel that we have some real control over ourselves.

An internal analysis involves checking what is occurring in the mind, and also going deeper, analysing 'Who is the 'me'? Who or what is the 'I' or 'me' that is feeling these things or experiences?'. In this way, we can go further with our internal investigation. If we do this periodically, we will begin to slowly get some real benefit. Through our internal analysis, when we realise the benefit of developing good qualities based on real kindness, real concern for ourselves and others, this positive state of mind will influence our attitude to become positive, which will result in a happy mind. This is something in which we can train ourselves and achieve through familiarity.

To answer the question of why are we currently inclined towards a negative state of mind, first we need to realise that we mostly have an unhappy state of mind, which is a result of a negative state of mind and ultimately a negative attitude. This negative attitude comes about readily due to the familiarity we have with it.

But just as we easily have a negative attitude now as a result of familiarity, likewise, through familiarity, we can definitely develop a positive state of mind. This is something we must understand. We must develop conviction in the fact that through familiarity we can develop our mind in a positive way.

We can use examples of other knowledge and qualities that we have acquired; we can see that these have come about through familiarity, from learning about them. Thus our mind has the potential to learn and acquire more knowledge, more qualities. One of the functions of the mind is that it can learn and increase its knowledge. That is a quality that our mind already has naturally. Having this predominant quality within ourselves, of being able to learn and increase our knowledge, we have to focus this ability in a positive way. That means familiarising ourselves with positive thoughts. Then we can achieve a positive outlook, which contributes to a positive state of mind.

So from our experience of the negative state of mind, we can conclude that we are already too familiar with it and

that it is something we should slowly weaken and begin to avoid. Our positive state of mind, on the other hand, may not be very strong, but it is a basis from which we can further develop a positive outlook.

In short, there are certain states of mind to be avoided, and certain states of mind to be adopted. This is true for anything we do. There are pros and cons, and we try to adopt what has more benefit or better qualities. Then we try to avoid that which seems to have more disadvantages. Even with normal activities, there are always pros and cons, and we adopt that which has more advantages and discard that which has the least advantages.

Our mental development is exactly the same. There are good states of mind and negative states of mind, and whatever activities we engage in are preceded by an attitude in our mind. So we need to check up on this attitude. If we are confident that it is positive, then we adopt that attitude and it will be beneficial. If our attitude is negative, we try to avoid that state of mind. In this way, having analysed ourselves and being clear about what is positive and negative, we adopt what is positive and cultivate those states of mind.

We should make it a habit to analyse our mind. Then we will come to realise through our own experience why our mind is so vulnerable to being easily elated or depressed as a result of external or internal factors. When we come to realise that our mind is so vulnerable, as a natural consequence, we will begin to understand others. Because we understand ourselves and see how difficult it is for our mind to be stable, we can develop patience with others. If we can learn to be patient with ourselves, we can learn to be patient with others. Therefore, really understanding ourselves can give us a good understanding of others, and we will be able to tolerate and understand them when they are going through difficulties.

Analysing and checking in this way is an organic process. We don't have to talk about religion or even bring a spiritual connotation into this. It is a factual process where we investigate ourselves and find the causes of our happiness or unhappiness. Through our own analysis we investigate ourselves. We don't have to use religious terms for this analysis, right?

Having done such an analysis, having found out the causes and conditions that make our mind either happy or depressed, and having started to work on that, we come to realise that, for those who are really working on their own mind, a transformation takes place. People who were previously short-tempered and easily irritable might slowly change after some time and become much calmer, more peaceful and less irritated. But the reverse is also true. People who may have been a little peaceful and calm initially could encounter influences and conditions that get them a little bit irritated. If they don't work on themselves and allow themselves to become irritated and angry, this irritable state of mind could increase. In both cases, the outcome is the result of familiarity.

So we need to understand that the qualities in our mind have to be developed. This means exerting some effort. Unfortunately, we don't have to put much effort into

developing the negative states of mind. We are already familiar with those: they come up very easily. We don't have to put much effort into developing them.

However, we do need to put some effort into developing good qualities. Unfortunately, they do not arise naturally, just like that. For example, it is true that certain people are naturally more intelligent and brighter, with a natural gift of being able to learn quickly. But even intelligent people have to learn, they have to put some effort in learning. Knowledge doesn't come about just like that. Even though someone may be intelligent, they have to actually study in order to learn. If an intelligent person doesn't study, they will not learn anything. On the other hand, for someone who is not so intelligent and slow to learn, if they put in a continuous effort, they will learn and gain knowledge. This example shows that without exerting ourselves, we cannot acquire good qualities; we have to put in some effort.

It is exactly same for the qualities that we can gain through meditation, or rather the qualities of the mind. If we wish to achieve a focused, clear and peaceful mind, we should exert ourselves in acquiring the causes for achieving that, which is the practice of meditation. Therefore, we need to learn about meditation and spend whatever appropriate time we have in doing some meditation.

Having a focused and clear mind contributes to a subdued mind and, as the Buddha mentioned, a subdued mind is a happy mind. From our own experience, we realise that when the mind is completely distracted and full of anxiety, that is an unsubdued mind. An unsubdued mind naturally leads to an unhappy and frustrated state of mind.

Having explained the significance and the purpose of meditation, we can now spend some time in engaging in meditation practice. In meditation practices, we first focus on a chosen object without letting the mind be distracted. When we choose an object of meditation, even though this may suggest an external object such as image of a deity like a buddha, it is not an actual external object that we focus on. Rather, having seen the external object with our naked eye, in the actual meditation, we attempt to have a vivid internalised image of that object; the image of that object comes from the mind itself. So what we are actually focussing on in meditation is the image of the object.

If we tried to experiment focusing our eyes on an external object, we would come to realise that our mind would not really settle well. It would not focus well, there would be lots of distractions. However, as soon as we internalise the image of the object and focus on that, we will notice immediately that there is a different effect in the mind. It naturally becomes more focused because it is an internal object, a mental image we are focussing on. This is generally how we should engage in meditation and focusing on an object.

In this case, the object we are choosing is not any external object but our own breath. We are using our breath as the object to focus on in our meditation. The breathing is more personal, an object that occurs within oneself. As it is not physical, we actually try to imagine seeing the

breath. We imagine the breath going in and coming out: that is what we focus on.

For our meditation to be effective, from the very beginning we must make the determination that for the duration of our meditation, we will try to put all our effort into focusing on the object, which is in this case is the breath. We make the decision that 'I will not let my mind be influenced by any other thoughts or distractions that may occur. I will not let my mind to follow that. I am going to constantly bring my mind back to focus on my breath and try to maintain that for as long as I can'.

If we don't make that determination from the very beginning, it will be very easy for the mind to be distracted – we may not even notice that it is distracted. If we make a strong determination from the very beginning, before we engage in meditation, our mind will be more alert and our awareness more acute. Therefore, we will be able to notice when our mind gets distracted and even if we are able to focus only for one or two minutes completely on the object, that will be a real solid good meditation. Whether it is just one or two minutes, we have a hundred percent focus on the object. This is how we train mind to be focused.

Therefore it is very important from the outset that we make this strong determination to keep our mind completely focused on the object. In this way, we will spend a few minutes in meditation, focusing on our breath. (*Pause for meditation*)

That might be sufficient for now. Do any of you have a really burning question in your mind, one that is important for you to get a quick answer to? If not, I will continue with the text.

Question: My brother died this morning in intensive care. I have been reading the Tibetan Book of Living and Dying (Sogyal Rinpoche) where he talked about the importance of recognising the clear light at the moment of death when the breathing stops. I had hoped to be able to read this to my brother at the moment he died, but I missed it. My hope was that I could help him recognise his true nature and he could meet with the Dharma. I feel that I should have been there.

Answer: Even though there is some effect from reading the text about the clear light, as you mentioned, the teachings say that primarily what takes effect at the moment of death are the imprints on the mental continuum of that being. Either way, when a strong imprint in the mind takes over, the external conditions cannot really affect that to a large degree. That is the main factor determining what kind of rebirth they will take.

It is also a fact that the effectiveness of reading the text depends very much on whether the dying person has studied and practised that. If the effectiveness were only dependent on someone reading the text – and we may even think that by calling someone special like a lama to read it that it might have a strong effect and might liberate the person – then we could just call lamas when someone was about to die and read the text and everything would be fine!

But the reality is that reading the text serves as a reminder to someone who has already practised and studied it. If they are not familiar with it all, there's not much of an effect either way. The dying person's mental

state is a completely withdrawn state of mind. If they are not familiar with and have not practised that particular path, it is quite difficult for them to understand and follow it. Even for someone who is alive, with a fresh and open mind, if they have not done any studies and you try to explain about the clear light and so forth, they will be completely lost and will not understand it. Even if you were to ask the people here, who are very much alive, 'What is the clear light?' it might be very hard to get an answer about what it is. They might actually start pointing at the lamp and saying, well, that light is very clear!

However, the fact remains that, because that action was done with an attitude to help and benefit the other, and because it has come from that very good motivation from your side, very likely there will be some benefit for him, but definitely there is benefit for yourself. That is definitely the case.

If there is any other question, you may raise your hand.

I will now continue and read a few lines from the text.

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

Having explained the four opponent powers earlier, the text summarises here saying that, in order for purification to take complete effect, all four opponent powers have to be intact during the practice. When all four opponent powers are intact, purification will definitely take place.

Having explained the process of engaging in a purification practice through applying the four opponent powers, the text now goes on to explain what are the measures or signs that show negative karma has been purified.

Before going into the detail of explaining how a negative karma is purified, we need to identify what negative karma is being purified. Even though they use the word 'negative karma' here, what is implied are the results of negative karma that we need to purify. The reason that we need to purify and prevent the results of negative karma from ripening is that we do not wish to experience the results of negative karma.

So what are the negative results of karma? They are every undesirable experience we have now. Everything undesirable that we experience now is said to be the result of negative karma. Anything from physical to mental discomfort or unpleasantness that we experience now is a result of negative karma. Any pleasant physical or mental feelings we experience are the result of positive karma.

Thus when we talk about purifying negative karma, what is being explained is how to minimise and eventually

completely eradicate the unpleasant experiences we get as a result of negative karma.

There are certain favourable and unfavourable circumstances that come with the very fact of being reborn in a certain situation. If we were to take two completely different examples, we could take the rebirth of an animal versus rebirth as a human being. Generally speaking, to have been reborn as an animal means there will be a lot of unfavourable circumstances or situations that are bound to be experienced. First, there is the limitation of knowledge, to what an animal can do for itself for its own happiness. Their minds are very limited and they are completely dependent on their surroundings, and so forth. There is very little an animal can do from its own side to try to make life comfortable. That is a fact. They are dependent entirely on their surroundings and environment.

Human beings, on the other hand, are born generally speaking with a naturally ability to modify their environment and their circumstances. Therefore, because of our intelligence, we have the ability to try to make things better or, at worst, try to overcome negative conditions, unfavourable circumstances.

Therefore, we can see the difference of the natural circumstances that surround a particular type of rebirth, animal versus human being. As the teaching describes, that is due to the very karma to be reborn in that state. Therefore to be reborn as an animal is considered to be a more unfavourable result of karma, to experience unfavourable circumstances, whereas rebirth as a human being is a favourable result of karma.

We have generalised about the two types of rebirth, animal and human, and how human rebirth is generally more favourable than animal rebirth because of the limitations that come along with the latter. However, when we go into the details of that rebirth, we can see that even within the animal realm there are differences. There are certain animals whose circumstances allow them to have more favourable living conditions than other animals. And certain animals in the wilderness and so forth are completely dependent on the elements and so suffer to a greater degree. So, within the animal realm, some have a better life – that is a fact.

Likewise within a human rebirth, we can see that there are certain humans who are born in situations that are not so favourable, and which contribute to a lot of misery and sufferings. Whereas other human beings are born in a country where the natural resources and conditions and so forth are favourable. In a country such as this, we have favourable conditions – the conditions contributing to our welfare and to our society are quite good. So when we look at that situation in general, the very circumstances into which we are reborn depend on causes and conditions and what is called karma.

Thus we can develop a strong conviction in karma and the wish to engage in positive karma, which brings about favourable circumstances, and avoid negative karma, which will bring unfavourable circumstances for us.

Looking at our own situation right now, when compared to so many others within the human realm, our conditions are really favourable compared to so many

other situations in this world. When we look into our own situation right now – with sufficient clothing, medicine and so forth – we can develop some contentment within our mind. Even though we may have some difficulties compared to others, they are really insignificant. What we have now is really quite favourable and good, especially the conditions for us to develop ourselves and practise. So we can rejoice and be happy with our present conditions, then start making prayers and even engage in practices that can bring about similar favourable circumstances for our future lives. In this way we can progress.

Now is a time when we can feel happy and enjoy ourselves. Actually it is good to remind ourselves that we are in a very favourable situation right now so that we don't start feeling too miserable. As explained in the teachings, within samsara the conditions that we have now couldn't be much better. We can actually enjoy our rebirth right now. Of course, we have certain limitations with our body – the very fact that we are born with a contaminated body means that we do get sick sometimes, and that we have mental problems, frustrations so forth that we have to deal with – but within the big picture, we are in a very favourable situation. So we can rejoice and use this opportunity in the best way.

The main point I'm stressing here is not to overwhelm oneself with worries. Through recognising that we have good conditions right now, try to be happy and rejoice about that and not to be overwhelmed with worries. If we start worrying about things, there is no end to our worries and we could just worry all our lives without it bringing any favourable situation for us. Unnecessary worries bring more stress and frustration in the mind.

That's why I advise students who come and see me personally that if they have any worries and concerns about the future, let aside those worries for a while. I advise them, 'Now you are able to make some money, you have the conditions to be able to work, so from whatever money you get for the week, for example, use some of that to have a good meal, eat well, be healthy in the body, wear nice and appropriate clothing, and if there is extra money left, put it in the bank, save it a bit and that will take care of itself. Don't worry too much about what will happen in the future'.

If we could actually spend our days, weeks in this way, with this sort of attitude, being happy and satisfied with what we have now and just continue to engage in our life in this way, we will end being much happier in the long run.

Before we end the session for the evening, let us again take a few minutes for meditation. This time as we focus we bring our mind inward, which means we distance ourselves from the distractions and focus on the sound of the mantra of Buddha Shakyamuni, which is to be recited.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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