
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As always it is good to spend some time in meditation, so we need to sit in a comfortable and relaxing position. Likewise we also need to have a relaxed and good state of mind. The importance of stressing a good physical posture as well as a good frame of mind is because of what we experience from the combination of the body and mind. When the body and mind are in a sound state, then we experience happiness and well being. Whereas when the body and mind is in flux and has no stability, then that also makes the mind unstable.

It is good to pay attention to how our body and mind influences our physical body, and how speech is influenced through our mind. We notice that when we look at our lives we can see that it is the thought which precedes our physical or verbal actions that influences those actions. When our physical and verbal actions are influenced by a disturbed or confused state of mind, we can see how our physical body and speech reacts to that, and how we engage in these actions. When the mind is in a state of peace, in a good frame of mind, then we can see that what kind of physical and verbal actions follow from that. When we look and investigate ourselves and our life, we can clearly see how we are influenced by our state of mind. So it is good to take notice and be aware of that, and try to maintain a good frame of mind.

It is the state of our mind which influences our physical and verbal actions and this brings about the respective consequences. We notice that when we have a good mental attitude, then that will positively influence behaviour and speech. Whereas when our mind is in a negative state, then that results in misbehaviour and harsh speech. Thus we can see that there are two sets of mind that influence us. So we have two choices. If we follow the negative side, that causes a negative outcome; if we follow the positive side, that brings about a positive result.

If we investigate further into what causes our negative states of mind to arise, we notice through our experience that a lot of the negative states of mind that we have are very much related to encountering a certain kind of object. When we encounter a sensual object, then it influences the negative state of mind. When we come into contact or even recall sensual objects of desire or objects of anger in our mind, then that generates a negative state of mind.

If we purposely avoid coming into contact with those objects of disturbance, then this protects the mind from the influence of any negative state of mind that is generated. It is very important to see how the mind is influenced by objects of desire or anger. The more we

become familiar with an object, the more our mind is influenced by that object. The more we acquaint ourselves with a negative object; the more likely that we will be influenced in a negative way. So it is very important for us to try to really minimise and eventually refrain from engaging with the objects that cause a negative state of mind to arise.

The more we acquaint ourselves with objects that cause our negative state of mind, such as desire and anger, to arise, the more it influences our mind. We need to allow our mind to be influenced by positive objects, objects that induce us to feel compassion rather than anger, objects that allow us to feel detachment rather than attachment. If we influence our mind with positive objects through acquaintance and familiarity, then our mind will be more likely to generate a positive state of mind. If our mind is easily influenced and easily prone to generating a negative state of mind, then that is because we are familiar with the object of influence.

We notice that with certain objects of desire there comes a point where separation is unthinkable; one cannot imagine being separated from that object. But in reality there will be a time when separation has to take place. When this happens, there is a lot of suffering in the mind. One may spend days and nights weeping because of the pain and hurt that one feels from the separation. That pain and suffering one feels is none other than being parted from the object that one has been completely familiar and immersed in. Because of the great familiarity one has with the object, it brings pain when one has to face separation. If we paid attention to how that works within ourselves, then we would distance ourselves from the object.

As well as the immediate external objects around us that we rely upon, and that cause us to feel either pain or happiness, there is another deeper level of unease that we feel, and we may not be able to pinpoint what is causing that. In a worldly situation we may feel that if we lack friends or if we lack financial stability, then that may be a cause for worries or frustrations and pain. If we had financial stability but don't have friends, then that might contribute to our misery and unhappiness. When we come to a point in our lives where we have everything - financial stability, friendship, companionship, enough food and clothing, and access to books and knowledge and all of that, there is a time when we may feel empty within ourselves, and feel that something is missing. Somehow we don't feel complete fulfilment within our mind, there's a feeling that something is lacking, which we can't really pinpoint as to what it is.

That lonely or empty feeling we feel within ourselves is one of the main culprits that brings us unhappiness in our mind. We come to a point where we can really honestly look into ourselves and realise that even though we have all the external conditions to be happy, we still lack real happiness and real contentment within ourselves, but we cannot really pinpoint what - internally or externally - is causing that. The underlying subtle unease within ourselves is what we have to identify. If we can identify that and begin to slowly work on that, work on trying to contain that mind and not allow it to be completely

immersed in the suffering and misery that the lonely feeling brings up, then a real happiness can begin in our lives. We can begin to feel a general ease of mind and happiness within ourselves.

In order to slowly contain and overcome that lonely unease, that deep feeling of discontent or lack of fulfilment within ourselves, we need to use the tools and techniques of meditation. This is where meditation really deals with the fundamental discontent and lack of fulfilment within ourselves, and replaces those feelings with fulfilment and a genuine sense of contentment and joy within ourselves. To bring that about, we need to meditate. When we begin to train in meditation we must first tackle the immediate object that caused the distractions and disturbance in our mind. Those are the objects we identify that cause us either strong attachment or anger and so forth, and cause the delusions which arise in the mind.

Initially the technique in meditation is to try to distance ourselves, or purposely not think about, or not allow our mind to go towards those objects of distraction. We completely distance our mind and bring the mind inward, having chosen an object to completely focus on one hundred percent. In training the mind initially to reach a state of mind of complete stability and focus, we need to first train to focus our mind on the object. In this case we choose the breath to focus on for the purpose of achieving single-pointed concentration.

We distance our mind from all sorts of distractions, and all positive or negative thoughts. For the time being, we don't allow our mind to be influenced by any kind of object or conceptual thoughts that arise in the mind, but rather we try to completely maintain our focus just on the breath. We just keep our focus and think only about the inflow and outflow of our breath: we concentrate on breathing and nothing else. This is how we train our mind to develop that concentration. For the next few minutes we will focus on our breath. (*pause for meditation*).

4.2.2.1.2. The actual way to take the essence

4.2.2.1.2.2. Training the mind in the stages of the path held in common with beings of the medium scope

4.2.2.1.2.2.1. The actual training in the reflections: the way to develop the mind that strives for liberation

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.1. Reflection on the truth of suffering-the faults of cyclic existence.

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.1.1. Showing the significance of the Buddha asserting the truth of suffering

In the last session, we covered why the sequence of the four noble truths was presented the way it was by the buddha: the truth of suffering, the truth of origination, the truth of cessation and the truth of the path. There is a question that is raised in the text: if the teaching of the truth of suffering kindles the desire for liberation, then should not the Buddha have taught the truth of cessation immediately after teaching the truth of suffering? That doubt is answered in the form of an analogy. If someone is suffering from illness where they experience pain, then the wish to be free from that should arise right away, shouldn't it? In that case, isn't it appropriate to talk about the cure rather than looking for the cause?

The answer is that there is no fault, because at the point of recognising suffering when we have recognised the truth of suffering, we will have a desire for liberation. Even though we have not yet identified the cause of suffering, we think 'if only we could attain cessation to relieve this suffering; we have not seen that we can eliminate that cause. So until we see the cause of the suffering and that it is possible to overcome the cause, the thought that we can be liberated and that suffering can cease, will not occur. The cause is explained in that order because we recognise that knowing the cause is essential. While we become interested in the truth of the path, we wonder about the path that leads to the cessation. For this reason the Buddha spoke of the truth of the path last. The sequence is presented so that we first recognise the suffering, then we strive to eliminate the cause, then in order to attain the cessation, we will rely upon the path.

The four truths are taught repeatedly throughout all vehicles - the Mahayana and the Hinayana teachings. Since the Buddha has included the vital points concerning the process of cyclic existence and its cessation in the Four Truths, understanding this teaching is crucial for achieving freedom. The four noble truths include the explanation of the whole path by combining two essential points - the process of how an individual being engages in samsara, and the reverse, which is how an individual can come out of samsara. The first two noble truths essentially include the process of how someone enters into samsara through the cause, which is the truth of origination. This leads to the experiences in samsara, which is the truth of suffering. The second two noble truths explain the process of how we leave samsara by following the truth of the path, which is the cause. This leads to the result which is reaching the truth of cessation, which is liberation.

Since the outline of the practice is important, it must be taught to the student in this specific order. Unless you reflect on the truth of suffering to the point of actually being revolted by cyclic existence, your wish to attain liberation will be mere words. Whatever you do will lead to the origin of further sufferings. If we do not have a true understanding of what the process involves, then our wish for liberation is just mere words without any real understanding of how to achieve that. Unless we reflect on the origin of suffering, and until we have a good understanding about the root of cyclic existence, which comes under karma and delusions, we are like an archer who shoots an arrow without being able to see where the target is. We will miss the essential points of the path, we will confuse the path to freedom with cyclic existence, and we will exhaust ourselves without result. Finally, if we fail to understand the need to eliminate suffering, we will also fail to recognise the liberation that provides the relief from suffering and its cause.

If we do not have a good understanding of the origination of sufferings, then any interest we may have in liberation will be mere conceit. Without having a good understanding of what causes the sufferings in samsara and identifying what the origination of samsara is, then to think that we are striving to achieve liberation would be a mere pompous wish that we may have in our mind, while we do not have any practical means to achieve that.

Question: If samsara is essentially suffering, is it right that people should be bringing children into the world?

When children come into this world, it is not as if one is bringing them into this world, they come of their own accord through their karma and delusions. So we actually don't have real freedom of choice to bring them in or take them away; they come of their own accord. There are certain parents or couples who would really like to have children but don't have any no matter how much they try. And there other couples who would rather not have children but keep having them. This shows us that there is no real control over bringing children into this world. However, even though our existence as a human being is in the nature of samsara, nevertheless within samsara birth as a human or other higher rebirths like divine celestial rebirths are rebirths in which we can use these circumstances to achieve liberation. It is one of the best rebirths we can have within cyclic existence, because we can create the causes for achieving liberation. This is one stopover that can be achievable.

This reminds me of a story in Tibet in a particular area called Pempo. In this part of Tibet there was apparently a person who was wealthy but he had no child and longed for one. So he requested a geshe to make prayers so that he could have a child. In response to his request, the geshe asked him what would be so pleasurable about having a child, and what could be so bad in not having a child. Then the geshe went on to explain that if he longed for a child, then he should imagine all the people in his town were all his children, that they all have to suffer and they will all have to get sick and so on. So having a child is no different from the rest of the people - their suffering would be unceasing.

Question: When you spoke of engaging the mind in negative actions you use the obvious example of anger. Anger is a broad definition and has many causes for different people. Is anger not possible to break down into its component parts?

There are different components. When we go into more detail in explaining the delusions, it is not just simplifying them into anger and desires. There are six root delusions or main delusions, and twenty secondary delusions. They can be summarised into three delusions. Anger, attachment and ignorance are a summary of the many complex different types of delusions that we have in our minds. When we simplify and mention one word such as anger or desire, we go into the classification of six root delusions and twenty secondary delusions.

Question: I often feel that my attempts to practise compassion may not be working properly. Perhaps everything that I feel for other people may be just seen as the way they see the world, like joining in their delusions. I feel like my attempt to practise compassion might actually further other people into bad karma. Could that possibly be the case? An example would be someone I lend some money to, and then only time I hear from the person is when he or she needs or borrow some more money.

Sometimes compassion is not practised skilfully. Compassion doesn't mean just giving, but seeing whether what we give is beneficial or not. We should judge our giving on whether it is helping people or not. Whether it is real compassion or not depends on whether it is helpful to others or not. In the case of giving money to others, if

we see them in a situation where they are deprived completely and are impoverished and don't have enough money to buy food, and if we cannot bear to see them in that impoverished state, then we can give money or food in order to help them, and in order to relieve them from their suffering. The main point and definition of compassion is to not to be able to bear the sufferings of others. If we can contemplate or meditate on compassion, then that is the best kind of meditation. The supreme meditation is meditating on love and compassion. An attitude of love and compassion towards others brings a natural wish to refrain from harming others. That form of love and compassion is non-violent and non-violence comes naturally from meditating on love and compassion. If we cannot benefit others, then we can make a commitment to refrain from harming others. Refraining from harming others is a benefit because we are not harming them, even if we have not purposely helped them. So practicing non-violence actually benefits others.

Let us spend a few minutes in meditation, and as we bring our mind inwards and distance ourselves from the distractions, we focus on the mantra of Buddha Shakyamuni:

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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