
The Condensed Lam Rim

ལྷན་ཁྲིམས་ལྷན་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

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As usual it's good to spend some time in meditation. To engage in meditation, sit upright and be comfortable. It is good to remind ourselves what the purpose for meditation is before we start. When someone asks, 'Why do we need to meditate?', it is good to reflect on the main purpose, which is to subdue the mind. We need to try to gain control over our own mind so that we can have a more focused and peaceful mind.

The reason why we need to subdue and control our mind is in order to make it more useful, so that we can engage more in positive deeds. The disadvantages of not having a controlled mind, a completely distracted and a scattered mind, is that the mind becomes completely frustrated, disorientated, with a sense of no meaning in life. Thus in meditation we try to keep the mind in focus so we can control it and put it to good use.

There are different levels of subduing the mind. Subduing the mind can mean withdrawing the mind inward and giving it a rest. If our mind is very distracted, then that can result in not having a good night's sleep. We may have noticed through our own experience that when we are really involved in difficult situations and the mind is completely filled with anxiety or worries, then the mind is completely scattered and distracted, and it is hard for us to have a good night's sleep. Sometimes, we go through a stage of having a sleep but not really having a deep sleep, we keep waking up in the night. In situations like that our body does not really have any rest, and as a result we become easily agitated and irritated the next day. Our life can be in a state of upheaval if we don't have a good rest.

The rest that we get from sleep is on a grosser level, whereas a really deep level rest can be gained from meditation. A really relaxed state of being comes from meditation. We can see even from a medical point of view how meditation can benefit our physical body. The very state of meditation naturally calms and soothes the whole nervous system within ourselves. It is clear that the physical body and our mind are very closely related; when one is disturbed, it definitely affects the other.

According to Tibetan medicine, when the mind gets agitated and disturbed, then it affects the four elements within our body, so they are not in harmony. When the four elements are out of balance, then we get very excited and our body becomes busy on a physical level. This in return will affect the mind again and it will become more agitated.

The relationship between the mind and the physical body is very much interconnected; it's a very close relationship where one affects the other. We can get into a vicious cycle where the mind is agitated and disturbed, and it causes an imbalance in the four elements within the body. This affects our physical health and makes us feel tired physically, which in turn affects our mind and we feel more unhappy and agitated. So we can see how the vicious cycle goes on. In

order to stop that, we must work primarily in calming and relaxing the mind.

Just as there is a very close relationship between our mind and our body, likewise there is also a close relationship between our actions and our mind, or the intention that precedes those actions. What we call intention is basically a state of mind. In other words our thoughts influence our physical and verbal actions. We can clearly see from our experiences, when we are in a positive frame of mind, then naturally our physical behaviour becomes much more acceptable and more appealing. Likewise, our speech becomes more pleasant and acceptable to others.

Conversely, if we have an agitated state of mind, it affects our intentions and then this affects our physical behaviour negatively. Just as we see the relationship between our own mind and our physical body, and the harmony between our mind and our body, likewise, what goes in our mind also affects the harmony or relationship between ourselves and others. That is also very clear.

If we take an example of two people living together, friends or partners, that harmonious relationship is very much based on thoughtfulness on both sides and having a calm mind. As long as they have a calm mind and things are going relatively well, mentally and physically, then there is a harmonious relationship. But if one partner gets agitated mentally, then that affects their physical behaviour as well as their speech. This in turn affects the other partner, making them agitated as well. And this is what brings a disturbance within a relationship.

Gauging from our own experience, as well as using the advice from the teachings, we should understand the main point, which is that everything - including our well-being in relationships - is very much dependent on our mental states. The main thing is to have a balanced mental state, which is a calm, peaceful, and kind mind. This will definitely bring about a genuine well-being and genuine happiness within us; in turn it will definitely bring about happiness for others resulting in a harmonious relationship. Therefore the root or the basis of our happiness is very much dependent on our healthy and calm state of mind. This should be clear.

To summarise, the main point is the necessity and the great advantage of subduing the mind. If one has a subdued controlled mind, then that contributes to our well-being. It is important to reflect on why we need to meditate. Meditation is basically the technique of subduing the mind. Having a calm mind will contribute to our well-being, so we need to understand how to bring about a calm subdued mind. It is important to understand what the meditation technique is. If we just hear about meditation, don't learn much about it and just try to meditate by ourselves, it might not really be the appropriate way to bring about a subdued mind.

If we lack the knowledge of the actual meditation technique, then a mind which may seem soothing may in fact turn out to be harming us. There might be other levels of minds that we don't recognise as being faulty, and we might be cultivating certain states of mind which will harm us. In learning the meditation technique, we are actually learning what the positive states of mind are that we need to cultivate, how to cultivate them to the subtlest level, what are the negative states of mind, how to avoid and remove them? It is important that we understand and use the appropriate meditation technique to bring about positive results.

Now we will engage in focused meditation, where we sit in an upright comfortable posture. Bring your mind inward by intentionally focussing within. This means we need to distance our mind from distractions and not allow the mind to follow the random thoughts that arise in our mind. Instead, bring the mind inward and focus on the breath.

As we focus on the natural rhythm of our breathing - the inhaling and exhaling of our breath, we keep our mind focused on that one hundred percent, and try not to become distracted with other thoughts. Just remain on that one object, which is 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

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.1.2. The actual meditation on suffering

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.1.2.1. Reflecting on the general sufferings of cyclic existence

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.1.2.1.1. Reflecting on eight types of sufferings

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.1.2.1.1.2. The way in which one needs to be free of laxity and excitement

We have come to the point in the outline of reflecting on the general suffering of cyclic existence which is divided into two, which is reflecting on the eight types of suffering and the six types of sufferings. The eight types of sufferings are divided into five different categories, and we have covered the first and second. The first looks at how to meditate in the stages of the sense faculties and the second looks at the way in which we need to be free of laxity and excitement during meditation.

We went over the explanation of the two different types of meditation in our last session. They are categorised as the contemplative meditation and analytical meditation. Initially contemplative meditation is important in developing a focused mind. Likewise analytical meditation is also extremely important once we have developed a focussed mind. So we can alternate between the contemplative and analytical meditation. An analytical meditation needs to have a focused mind, and is used after we contemplate one object for a certain period of time. Only then can we go into analytical meditation of topics.

With analytical meditation, you should arrest excitement and not take up any object, virtuous or non-virtuous or neutral, other than what you are meditating upon. Maintain your focus on that chosen object during the meditation. Even virtuous distractions can interfere with the object we are focussing on. For example, if we are meditating and focusing on the suffering nature of sentient beings, then the mind may start to reflect on other features of sentient beings, such as the impermanent nature of sentient beings. Now thinking about the impermanent nature of sentient beings itself may be a virtuous reflection, but for the time being it interferes with our particular meditation, which is contemplating the suffering of sentient beings. So even though it is virtuous by nature, because it interferes with our meditation and our focus at that time, it becomes a distraction. When we focus on a chosen object, we should not allow any distractions, whether virtuous, non-virtuous or ethically neutral, to interfere with our focus.

The term for the distraction in our meditation is called excitement. We should not allow the mind to be influenced by excitement. As we focus on the chosen object of

meditation, we internalise the object that we are focussing on. As we focus on the internal object, the mind becomes withdrawn from external objects, and we should be focusing on that particular internal object. The mind can be excited with virtuous, non-virtuous or neutral objects, and thus one should train one's mind to stop these distractions.

The two main obstacles to meditation are, on one hand, excitement which allows the mind to wander off to other objects, and the other that which causes the mind to weaken the focus on the object. The other interference that can occur during meditation is sleep and lethargy. As we maintain our focus on the internalised object, we may come to a point where other obstacles such as sleep may arise. Other more subtle obstacles are lethargy and laxity. While the mind is focussed, the intensity or the clarity of our focus begins to diminish or weaken due to these obstacles. So, as the text says "without letting one's mind fall under the influence of sleep, lethargy or laxity, meditate on the state of consciousness that is very clear".

As the text further explains, "we must continually meditate in the state of consciousness that is very clear and pure". Having a state of consciousness that is clear and pure becomes the antidote for overcoming the sleep and lethargy or laxity that can occur in the mind. The main point here is to develop a concentration, a state of mind that is completely focused and fully aware of the chosen object. To develop profound concentration we must tackle these two main obstacles.

Excitement has a grosser level of excitement and a subtle level of excitement. Excitement itself is an element of an attachment, so when we become attached to other objects during our meditation, the mind becomes excited and causes us to wander off. The gross level of excitement is when the mind immediately wanders onto another object completely when we are attempting to focus on a particular object. The two main tools for noticing that the mind has wandered are mindfulness and introspection.

Mindfulness keeps the mind continually on the object to make sure it is focused on the object. Mindfulness also notices whether the mind is focused or whether it wanders off or not, and tries to bring it back when it wanders off. Introspection checks on what kind of state the mind is in, to make sure the mind is not in either state of excitement or laxity. Introspection makes sure and continuously checks up on whether the mind is really focussed or not.

Subtle excitement is when, even after having brought back the mind from the distractions, we notice that on a very subtle level the mind continuously seems to wander off again, even after we have continuously tried to bring it back.

Combining sleep, laxity and lethargy into one, the mind begins to sink. The very gross level, of course is sleep, and on the subtle level there is lethargy and laxity. While the mind is focused on the object initially, the intensity and clarity began to weaken, and that becomes another major obstacle for us in developing profound unique concentration. We must use the tools of mindfulness and introspection to tackle the interferences of excitement and laxity.

The Lam Rim goes on to quote from another scripture called *Engaging in the Bodhisattva's Deeds* by Shantideva: "The one who knows reality has said that prayer's austerity, even when practised for a long time is pointless if it's done with a distracted mind". The quote from Shantideva's text, makes it clear as it mentions, 'The one who knows reality,' referring

to the Buddha with an omniscient mind, had said that whether we are saying prayers or doing other practises such as meditation, even if we practise it for a long time, it will be pointless if we do it with a distracted mind.

We must understand the explanation in the right context. 'Pointless' should not be taken literally; it doesn't mean that there is no benefit at all in doing prayers and meditations with a distracted mind. When it says 'pointless', it is explicitly saying there wouldn't be that much benefit if we do practices with a distracted mind. It should be understood in that context, as there is definitely benefit if we do prayers. For example saying prayers is like reciting mantras. At the very least, it definitely prevents us from engaging in idle gossip, - talking about senseless things. If we spend a lot of time saying mantras, then during that time we're not engaging in senseless talk, so there is definitely benefit.

Similarly when we're meditating, just sitting down quietly means that even the mind is a little bit distracted from engaging in negative physical deeds, so there is some benefit. However, if the mind is distracted when we are meditating, then we don't seem to get any satisfaction from our meditation. We can see from our own experience that if we have a more focused mind, then we do feel much better afterwards. Doing practices without distractions carries much more weight, so the benefit is much greater.

The benefit from having a focused mind free from distractions is really evident. A focussed meditation where the mind is free from distractions and is really focused for even five minutes is far more worthwhile than a meditation done for half an hour with a distracted mind. If we spend even only five minutes in meditation with a very focused mind on a continuous basis, then it forms a good familiarity and a good habit in our mind. Even if it is only for a short time, whenever you go into meditation it will be like going on autopilot – we will automatically go into a really deeply focused meditation.

Whereas if we get into a habit of having a distracted meditation, even if we do it for half an hour or longer it will be of not much benefit. Because of the habituation that we formed of being distracted, when we meditate we might be focused for a while but then become distracted again. When we allow our mind to get distracted and have to bring our focus back again repeatedly; even if we spend half an hour or more like this, a bad habit forms in our mind, so that whenever we engage in meditation, our mind would be distracted, and we will never gain a really good result from our meditation. Therefore advice on meditation recommends that we start meditating for a short period of time and slowly increase it, based upon what we can do well in a short period of time.

Thus, a five minute focussed meditation is far more worthwhile than half an hour of distracted meditation. If we initially begin with for example, even three minutes. If we attempt to have a focussed mind during those three minutes, then as we become familiar and engage in the three minutes of focussed meditation, when we add on another minute to that, because of the familiarity and good habits we have formed in the earlier minutes, the next one minute will naturally be a focussed one minute. Each minute added on, would be a focused and clear minute of meditation.

But if we had fallen into the habit of engaging in a distracted meditation for a long period of time, such as half an hour, even if we were to add on ten minutes, then that extra ten minutes becomes a forty minute meditation, which sounds like long time in meditation but actually would be only a

distracted meditation. So it is worthwhile and much more practical to start with a short meditation that is focused, and add on to that slowly as we become skilled with that.

That is why Lama Tsong Khapa in his text, *The Graded Path to Enlightenment* explained by quoting from Shantideva's text. He again mentions that 'pointless' doesn't mean that there is no benefit at all, but rather the benefit derived from a distracted meditation would be minimal.

Question: If a person is experiencing some energy disturbance - like a quick energy moving in the body like electricity, are there times where it is not useful to meditate?

Response: When there is a disturbance in the body, it could be either due to a physical weakness, which comes from illnesses, or it could be the mind itself being disturbed. So depending on how the bodies or energies are affected in the body, if it is actually due to the mind being disturbed, then rather than completely ruling out meditation and leaving it aside, it might be a good idea to make some attempt and try to see that maybe through meditation the mind can become more restful and settled.

As a result the energy in the body would become more balanced. Initially engage in some sort of very simple meditation, such as just focussing on the breath. Actually just focusing on the breath has a natural soothing effect on the mind, which in turn benefits the body at the physical level as well. To do another meditation, where one has to do a lot of thinking or analysing, might be harmful in that sort of state. Focussing more on a simple meditation could be useful.

Before we conclude for the evening, let us again sit in an upright and relaxed position, and this time focus on the mantra of Buddha Shakyamuni by just keeping our mind focused on the sound of the mantra:

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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