
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual, it would be good to spend some time in meditation. One can summarise the purpose of meditation as protecting the mind from unhappiness, by maintaining the happy states of mind and a kind attitude within oneself. Meditation is very useful to protect and preserve our mind. It is appropriate to engage in means to protect the happiness of our mind as that is what we all strive for in whatever activities we engage in. We all strive to gain happiness and mental wellbeing. Any activity that we engage in, even a normal mundane job is basically a means to gain some happiness in our life. That is our goal anyway, to pursue happiness.

From morning to night we seem to be always busy doing something. If we ask ourselves why we are doing these things, it really comes down to the fact; whatever we do is a means to gain some happiness. Happiness is what we are really seeking. Now the question is, whether engaging solely in mundane activities brings about real happiness for ourselves or not? That is a question we need to ask ourselves. Is our busy life contributing to our physical and mental wellbeing or not? If we can clearly see that what we are doing is contributing towards gaining real happiness, then that is fine. We can rejoice in what we are doing. But, if we find that what we are doing is leading to more chaos, more unrest, more dissatisfaction in the mind, then we need to consider changing our approach in life and find other means that can contribute to gaining real happiness. We need to seek the right means to gain real happiness in our mind.

As mentioned earlier, when we look within ourselves, we find that what we are really seeking is physical and mental wellbeing. On a physical level we want to be healthy, that which contributes to our physical happiness, and then we need mental happiness as well. To put it simply, what we are all pursuing is physical and mental happiness.

We do need to take responsibility for our own wellbeing. We are taking responsibility for ourselves when we really start looking after ourselves. That is done initially by searching for the right means to bring about true happiness and wellbeing for ourselves. Once we find the right means to bring about real wellbeing for ourselves, then we can contribute to other's wellbeing. This is something that we really need to consider and look into. Now we might ask the question, how can we bring about happiness for ourselves? How do we bring about a true sense of physical and mental wellbeing?

Whether it is the ultimate goals that are mentioned in the teachings of obtaining liberation and enlightenment, or whether it is the wellbeing for our future lives, or even

the wellbeing and contentment that we can achieve in this very life; it is appropriate to seek the proper means for achieving that. There may be some who consider making money as the ultimate means to gain happiness, thus always pursuing a career of making more and more money. Of course we all know that money does not solve all our problems. Just having material wealth will not bring real contentment and happiness in our mind. So, we need to look beyond just material gain.

Sometimes we can see the absurd situation where, even after having accumulated a lot of money, some are not able to use it for their own good. They may try to invest it or stack it away in the bank and then live on very meagre food and clothing. All the money is just put away in the bank, rather than using a portion of it wisely to better their living conditions. That seems to be a pity. It is a pity to see that some people who work so hard to accumulate money, are later not able to use it for themselves or for others efficiently. The reason for making money in the first place, was so that one can use it to bring about certain amount of comfort for oneself. If one makes money and actually uses it to clothe oneself properly, to get proper nutritious food and live in a relative comfortable place, then it has contributed to a certain degree to gain physical and mental wellbeing for oneself. In that process, one is using money in a wise way. Then whenever possible, if one also shares it with others, then one is actually putting it to good use, and working hard to make money has served its purpose.

The Buddhist teachings always emphasis the importance in having a good motivation. A good motivation can be either developing a great, grand altruistic attitude or something much simpler. On a practical level, on a daily basis, having a good attitude can be as simple as having the right approach to life, that which can contribute to one's general wellbeing. This would include understanding that the whole purpose of making money is to bring about a general wellbeing. As one is making money, if one uses it wisely to clothe oneself well, eat good nutritious food and live comfortably, that would be its proper use. Otherwise there is not much purpose.

The main point I am stressing here is that mental wellbeing, is of the utmost importance in our life. Once we find the means to gain some mental happiness it is extremely important that we try to protect that happiness. Losing mental happiness would be a far greater loss than to lose a great amount of money. It would be a much greater loss. That is something that one must keep in mind. The most valuable thing in one's life is one's mental wellbeing, mental happiness.

As I stress the importance of mental wellbeing and happiness, we come to the point of how to gain mental happiness and this brings us back to the importance of meditation in daily life. What is being stressed here is that a proper meditation technique should be a means to bring about mental happiness within oneself. The reason we stress here a 'proper technique', is because if one finds that one is spending time in meditation but it does not seem to contribute to one's mental well being and happiness but actually starts to disturb one, then the fault does not lie in the practice itself. The fault lies in not

using a 'proper technique'. Because one might not be using the proper technique, one's practice is not fruitful and one does not gain positive results. If that is the case, then one must realise that one needs to correct the technique.

This is something one should gauge and understand oneself. One does not need to go round checking with everyone whether one is following the proper meditation technique. One is using a proper meditation technique when one finds that it contributes to one's mental wellbeing, that it calms one down and it helps particularly to subdue the mind, which means helping the mind to settle negative states of mind and stop delusions from arising. If one can see that as a result of one's meditation one's mind is becoming more and more subdued, then one can rest assured that one's meditation technique is a proper technique. As the teaching says, the result of meditation should be that one's mind becomes subdued.

If one finds that this is the case, then one can continue with one's practice. Whereas, if one finds that it actually seems to disturb one's mind, then one has to question one's technique. Some may misunderstand meditation to be just sitting upright in a rigid posture and closing one's eyes, but that in itself, as mentioned many times before, is not necessarily engaging in meditation.

In developing one's meditation technique and engaging in a daily practice, one should see a positive transformation taking place within oneself. However the transformation from meditation should not be limited to feeling subdued during the meditation session. It is quite natural that the mind becomes calm during the meditation session as it focuses on the breath. Just focussing on the breath naturally has a soothing effect and during that period of time it will help the mind to settle down. But the real test is when one comes out of meditation. If one's technique has been proper when one comes out of meditation the effect should last for a longer period of time. If when one comes out of meditation one finds that one is completely ordinary again, with all the normal delusions arising in the mind and with no means of controlling them, then the meditation technique has not served its main purpose. The technique has not really been a proper technique.

During the meditation session, it is natural to be able to keep one's mind focused for a certain period of time. By just closing one's eyes, because one does not see all the distractions, that in itself brings about a soothing and calming effect to the mind. When we close our eyes, we are temporarily shutting off from the outside world and so we don't follow the distractions, but we can notice that as soon as we open our eyes again, our mind immediately goes out and clings on to whatever we see. The effects of meditation practice should not be like that. It should not be like just temporarily closing our eyes and then opening them up and becoming completely immersed in what we see outside. The practice of meditation should have a lingering, long effect where we maintain a subdued state of mind even after the meditation session that we can carry into our daily working lives.

In order to take one's meditation practice seriously, one needs to periodically think about the advantages of meditation and the disadvantages of not meditating. One has to go over and over this before one engages in the practice of meditation and, in fact, to even attempt meditation one needs to reflect over and over again about the disadvantages of not meditating, and the great advantages one would derive from meditating.

For example, when we talk about subduing the mind we refer to controlling the negative states of mind that arise. Now in a meditation practice, after initially focusing on our breath, that being the initial practice, the real meditation comes when we develop the antidote for overcoming specific negative states of mind.

Therefore, in thinking about the disadvantages of not meditating we reflect on the negative state of mind, which as soon as it arises, disturbs our mind. We all have a particular negative state of mind that we are familiar with: as soon as it arises in our mind it makes us feel uncomfortable. When we identify that negative state of mind we are taking the first step. That is what we are combating and trying to overcome.

So we need to find the antidotes for overcoming that negative state of mind. We all have the experience of being a victim of negative states of mind. As soon as it arises we feel shaken and disturbed. That negative state of mind is something that we should pinpoint and remind ourselves, 'This is what I have to overcome. This is the negative state of mind that I am attempting to overcome in my meditation.' Thus one practises antidotes for overcoming the negative states of mind.

A particularly vivid example would be anger. When we are in a relatively relaxed state of mind everything seems OK for the time being, but then for whatever particular reason, anger might arise in our mind. As soon as anger arises the earlier state of tranquillity and calmness has suddenly disappeared from our mind. We start getting agitated and we feel uncomfortable. We know this to be a fact from our own experience. As soon as anger arises we feel uncomfortable. That is one particular example of how a negative state of mind disturbs our peace, our tranquillity and calmness. It is very clear that anger is a culprit that robs us of our own peace and that is why we need to apply the antidotes for overcoming anger.

Having mentioned some of the benefits of meditation and how it can serve our purpose we can now take some time to actually engage in some meditation. That is done by sitting in a comfortable, upright posture and bringing our mind inward. In meditation we need an object to focus on. Here we use our breath as an object to focus upon. We direct our full focus on our breath and do not allow our mind to be influenced by other distractions, by other thoughts and so forth. Even if they arise we don't allow our mind to focus on them and just maintain our focus on the breath. If we put our full attention into focusing on our breath we will notice that the mind becomes more alert. As it becomes calm it has the effect of making it alert and clear. When we see that immediate result, it can help to refresh our determination to engage in the practice of meditation on a continuous basis.

We can initially have a strong inspiration and determination to engage in the practice of meditation, but over time we may lose that enthusiasm due to certain circumstances. Because of something happening in our life, we may lose that enthusiasm or inspiration. If we just let ourselves be and don't make any attempt to meditate again, we will completely lose that inspiration and determination for further practice. So, even the few minutes when we focus on our breath, can help to restore our inspiration and determination for the practice. Even a few minutes meditation can very good, when we do it in a sincere way. As you attempt to meditate now, it would be good to continue doing meditation daily in order to gain a kind mind. (*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 the eight types of sufferings

Continuing from the text, we have come to the explanation of the various types of suffering, particularly the eight types of suffering. Within the eight types of sufferings we have covered the first two and now we come to the third that is the suffering of illness.

The purpose of explaining the sufferings in detail can be understood from different aspects or angles. One could say that from gaining a good understanding of the various types of sufferings of cyclic existence, one can get a good understanding of the nature of cyclic existence and thus generate a wish to abandon cyclic existence and to be free from it. It can be an inspiration to free oneself from samsara. Also, it can be that by understanding suffering one will be prompted to understand the causes of suffering. If there are different types of sufferings, then what are the causes of suffering? Understanding the causes of suffering would then lead to an attempt to abandon these causes. Thus an understanding of suffering helps to inspire us to understand the causes of suffering. Furthermore it is a means to generate love and compassion towards others. As one understands that others go through various sufferings, it can help us to develop love and compassion towards other beings.

The third suffering is the suffering of illness. It is said that those who are suffering from an illness are beings that are in a very grave and destitute situation. So nursing the sick is said to be one of the best ways of serving others. Buddha Shakyamuni is said to himself have nursed the ill in his lifetime. There are many instances in the story of his life where he nursed and cared for those who were ill. The Buddha himself said in his teachings, "Objects of destitution are those who are sick; Objects of kindness are one's own parents".

Those to whom we need to repay kindness, is our parents. I have mentioned many times before, in detail,

the kindness of our parents. Thus they become an object for us to repay their kindness. When we help and serve the ill it becomes a practical real way to be of service to others. It is really important that we extend our time and energy and help to those who are not well. That begins, of course, with those who are close to us. We can't do much for others that are out of our reach, strangers and other beings who are ill. The most we can do is pray for them. We cannot practically serve them because they are out of reach. But those who are in reach are those who are close to us, such as our parents, relatives, friends and so forth. When we notice that those who are living around us are not well physically or mentally it is really important that we try to extend our help in whatever way we can.

Whatever help we can give to someone who is not well is really appreciated because they are in a destitute situation. There are many ways that we can benefit others and it is really important that we keep it in mind and try to practise in that way. When someone helps a person who is ill, destitute in sickness, the person who is ill will consider the person who is helping them as a real, true friend. This help is really appreciated because they are in a destitute situation.

In regard to objects that we need to help when they are ill, we begin with our parents. It is good for those whose parents are alive, to remind themselves that the real help we can give our parents is when they are in a really difficult situation. The most appreciated help we can give would be to aid and nurse people when they are ill. For that reason, I remind some people who say they are not really engaging in any practice of Dharma, that when they help their parents who may be ill, they are practicing the real Dharma. Whether they are intentionally generating a proper motivation or not, just the fact that they are helping means that they are engaged in the practice of Dharma. There couldn't be a better practice of Dharma at that particular time. Helping their parents in need, nursing them when they are ill, is really one of the best practices.

I have many personal accounts of how people who help those who are sick are the people who are considered most trustworthy and the truest friends. It is true, when we think about it, that someone who helps you when you are in a destitute situation, not when you are well and everything is fine, but when you are in a desperate situation, really shows their true colours. It really shows that they are by nature a kind person to help someone who is in a desperate situation.

Even with our partners, when they are sick and unwell it is good that we extend our help to them and remind ourselves of the commitment that we had made earlier. I don't have much knowledge, but I have heard that when you make a marriage commitment there is some sort of indication that you will help even when they are sick or ill, for better or worse. I don't know but there must be some sort of pledge you make. You make these promises in a Christian marriage in front of God. If you promise God you will help your partner especially when they are ill and you don't later on then that would be deceiving God.

It is good to reflect upon some facts. I mentioned to certain people who have said that it helped to reflect on how we came into this world. When we first came into this world what kind of situation we were in? Were we able to care for ourselves? Were we able to clean ourselves up whenever we made a mess? Whenever we had to go to the potty, were we able to clean ourselves? Were we able to clothe ourselves? Were we able to feed ourselves at that time? We were completely dependent on the kindness of our parents, if they took care of us at that time. It was our parents who fed us, clothed us, who cleaned us and when we were completely helpless we would not have survived if they had not cared for us.

Furthermore, not only did our parents care for us, by clothing us, feeding us, and cleaning us, but they did it with great joy. Some parents have conveyed to me that it is not an easy job; it is difficult, especially when you have to wake up in the middle of the night and have to change diapers and so forth. It is not easy when a baby cries, but it doesn't cause any mental anguish. Rather they did it with joy in their mind. It gives them joy to help and care for their child. Thus, when we reflect upon how our parents cared for us, not only did they take care of us on a practical level, feeding and clothing us and so forth but also they did it with joy. Isn't that amazing! They sacrificed their own time and energy and took care of us and the fact that we survived until now is due to their kindness.

Now that we have matured and are at the point that we are able to take care of ourselves, if our parents are ill and in a destitute situation, wouldn't it be reasonable, logical, to take care of them as a way to repay their kindness. We should actually have happiness and joy in taking care of our parents and helping them when they are in need. I am not denying that there can be difficulties between parents and children. For whatever reasons the relationship might be difficult at times, but nevertheless, on a practical side, one must also think about how one was cared for and so forth and think about the natural way to pay this back.

If we help our parents when they are in need, that becomes a natural cycle of nurturing and caring for each other in a very healthy, good way. Despite the general suffering we have to experience, it is still a means to bring about a sense of joy, a feeling of closeness and that will naturally carry on to our parents. That becomes a good way of caring and helping each other, a good system which is passed on to the next generations.

It seems to be a fact that parents have a natural wish to be close to their children when they are sick or ill. The first person they might have in their mind who would care for them would be their children. That is like an instinctive wish. We do hear certain elderly people say, 'It would be very difficult if I get sick because I don't have any children'. That implies that those who have children are better off. I am not sure if that is true in all cases, but that should be the case. Those who have children have a natural wish when they are in a desperate situation and their trust goes towards the children.

We have run out of time to go over each individual category of sickness, this evening. We can leave that for

the next session. What we need to remember is the summary of what has been explained this evening. Reflecting on suffering, and in this particular instance the suffering of illness, can be a means for us to develop a sense of kindness and concern for others, beginning with our parents. If we can extend our kindness, love and compassion towards our parents in a real, practical way that would become a good basis for us to further develop our love and compassion and extend it to other beings.

We begin with those who have been kind to us and then repay that kindness in a practical way. Then it becomes easy for us to help others in a similar way. That is stressed because of the unique relationship you have with your parents. You have a karmic relationship with your parents and the real help that we extend to them on a practical level becomes a really meaningful, practical way of benefiting them. That mutual connection can be developed. That nice warm feeling between a parent and child can come about when, from the parent's side, there is unconditional love towards their children which means that, to the best of their ability, they extend their kindness and concern to their children. Children will feel genuine appreciation and respect will develop in their mind. To a certain degree that will come about naturally but it is good for us to train our mind in thinking in that way. It is good for us to think about the kindness of our parents and that natural respect will come. Those who are older can extend their concern and love towards the younger generation and the younger generation will feel a natural respect towards the older generation. In that way we can bring about a real, mutual, good understanding and good feeling between the older and younger generation. Then there won't be a generation gap, so to speak.

Before we conclude for the evening let us again spend a few minutes in meditation. We can readjust our physical posture to be sitting upright and relaxed, then bring our focus inward and this time we focus on the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. Focus on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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