
The Condensed Lam Rim

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15 August 2007

As usual it would be good to spend some time in meditation. Meditation practice has two main benefits. The first is that regular practice will help us secure the good potential we have in our mind. We all have good inner potential, but if we don't recognise and secure it, we may lose it. The second benefit or purpose is to better understand the nature and workings of our mind. That is done through analysing what is going on in our mind. One of the practices of meditation, is being mindful - to check what is going on in our mind. As we analyse what is going on in our mind, we come to notice the positive and negative states of our mind.

When we see what is going on in our mind, it becomes possible for us to be able to transform the negative states to positive ones and so forth. This is what we can achieve through analysing our thoughts.

As ordinary human beings, we are inclined to direct most of our focus or energy outwardly into worldly distractions. Normally, we don't have a habit of looking within ourselves. Through regular meditation practice, however, we can train the mind to look inward and investigate what is going on rather than just focusing outside. This process by itself will bring about a noticeable transformation in us.

Normally we give our full attention to the outside world, which is done to pursue material gain, such as developing a career, work, and so forth. While we do gain some material benefit from focusing outwardly, if we have put our complete focus on the outside world without paying attention to our inner world, we will notice that it doesn't bring us real inner satisfaction. Even when we obtain some material gain, it does not guarantee inner satisfaction or contentment. We may still have an empty feeling, as if there is something lacking or missing. If you look into your own life, you may at times have come across an experience like that.

When we reach a point of acutely feeling a lack of deep satisfaction and contentment within our mind, we can investigate and ask ourselves 'why is it that even though things are going relatively well for me externally, I still have that empty feeling inside?' That definitely points to something missing, for us not to feel a sense of satisfaction, contentment in one's mind. Nothing is missing externally, but something is missing internally – i.e. a positive feeling or attitude. We can only develop that positive attitude by looking into ourselves. As mentioned earlier, one of the benefits of meditation is to secure our positive potential. This is what we are referring to – that meditation can help bring about our positive potential, which is basically a kind attitude.

When the mind is always focused outward, it is completely scattered, focusing on many different things. We will notice that there is a lack of intensity because there are so many external things and the mind goes in so many diverse directions; it lacks a strong intense focus on any particular thing. When the mind focuses externally, it focuses on all the diverse external objects of all three times: things that have occurred in the past, all the distractions happening around us now, and speculation about things that would happen in the future. Our focus is diverted to the past, present and future – usually the past and future. This completely scattered mind is not a focused mind and because of the lack of focus, it is not a clear mind. When we lack a clear mind, whatever we engage in does not bring about any beneficial result.

However, when we withdraw our mind from external distractions, focus on an internal object and maintain our focus that object, this helps the mind naturally to become more focused. As we withdraw our mind from all external distractions related to the past, present and future, it becomes more focused. As a result, it becomes clearer, and as a result of becoming clearer, the mind becomes energised and its positive potential increases.

So the practical benefit that we derive from meditation practice – from bringing the mind inward – is that the mind becomes clearer and more focused. Thus, increasing our positive potential which naturally brings about inner peace and calmness. As a result of meditation, it brings about a peaceful and calm effect within us. We will then come to the conclusion that without engaging in meditation practice, we will never find everlasting inner contentment and peace. We begin to realise how essential meditation is for us to have a better life. We come to understand that engaging in regular meditation practice would only be to our benefit, enabling us to maintain a calm and peaceful state of mind, and thus increase our positive, kind mind. When we come to realise how essential meditation practice is, we will naturally feel inclined to engage in a regular meditation practice, such as in the morning, before going about our daily lives. Spending a few minutes meditating in the morning before we go to work would become a priority for us. Then after work, after we come home, finding a few minutes to just reflect inward and do some meditation practice would also become a priority. When that becomes a natural routine, we would come to notice a real effect from our regular practice of meditation. When we engage in daily practice like that, when we go to work, the work that we engage in brings about the result of us obtaining some money, and we appreciate the money we get from that work. We would get real satisfaction from that as well.

In order to now spend a few minutes in meditation, let us begin by adjusting our sitting posture, which is a relaxed and upright one. After we find a comfortable upright sitting posture, the next important thing is to set our mind for meditation. This is done by first withdrawing it from all external distractions. Then we focus on the chosen object, which is our breath, and try to bring our full attention to the breath.

As we mentally focus on the natural inflow and outflow of our breath, it is important that one commits oneself wholeheartedly to the breath, especially beginners. Even if it is only for one or two minutes, it is very important that one begins with full attention, not having a half-hearted approach but fully focused on one's breath. This is essential because the start of our meditation sets the tone for our regular practice. Even if we engage in one or two minutes of focused meditation at the start, then slowly, as we increase that time, we can maintain that clear and good focus. We will then definitely see a positive result and benefit from one's meditation. So thus we spend the next few minutes focusing on our breath. (*Pause for meditation*)

That should be sufficient. As we have engaged in our meditation practice now, it would be good to try to develop a regular practice in our daily lives, which would serve as a means to bring about relative calmness and peace in our mind. It is really important that we try to secure a peaceful and calm mind. As we all notice, peace is something we all have to develop within ourselves. It is not something we can get from external factors.

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

From the text we have been studying, we were covering the section on reflecting on the sufferings of the cyclic existence to bring about a mind of disenchantment towards it. This is explained within the eight categories of sufferings of cyclic existence.

Within the eight types of suffering, we have come to the third type. This is all in relation to the First of the Four Noble Truths, which is understanding of the truth of suffering.

The third suffering from the eight types of suffering is the suffering of illness. The benefits of reflecting on suffering are twofold. By reflecting on one's own suffering, one can generate a sense of the reality of cyclic existence, developing a strong sense of disenchantment and wishing to be free from such a state ourselves. Also, relating to our own suffering can be a basis for understanding others' suffering and we can thus develop compassion for others.

When we relate to the suffering of sickness in general, we will have all experienced it at one point or another. From our own experience, we will have noticed that when we have suffered a particular type of illness, when others have a similar illness, we can immediately sympathise because we have experienced it ourselves. We can immediately understand how the other must be feeling,

and can develop a sense of compassion towards them. So it seems to be really important to reflect on these sufferings in general.

The suffering of illness is divided into five. The first is that illness changes the nature of the body. When we are ill, the appearance and lustre of our body begins to change. The flesh wastes away, we become quite thin and pale, the skin dries out, and the normal lustre and good appearance of our body begins to diminish.

The second suffering in relation to illness is that our pain and anguish increases and are seldom absent. As the text explains, when we are ill, the elements of the body – water and so forth – are not in equilibrium and fluctuate, causing physical torment, which produces mental anguish. Because the four elements in our body are out of balance and are not in equilibrium, this causes the body to experience ailments. When the physical body experiences pain, if it were not to disturb our mind it would be relatively acceptable. But when the body experiences pain, it causes the mind to feel anguish and feel unhappy. When the mind suffers, this in turn causes the elements within the body to further be out of balance, and the sickness gets worse. This escalates the suffering that we experience and brings about so much more suffering for us.

With this natural process, we can understand how our physical suffering contributes to our mental suffering. If we can understand that process, we can actually take a little control and minimise the mental suffering, which can then help reduce the sufferings that we experience. It is good to understand this process.

We will notice that there are individuals who may react differently when they are told they have a certain kind of illness. Certain individuals may not become too shocked and maintain a certain level of mental calmness. While that may not immediately cure the sickness, it can definitely reduce the chances of the illness getting worse. As mentioned earlier, if the mind suffers, that can further increase the sickness. When we can control the mind and not worry too much about the illness, it can definitely help to reduce the mental pain, and we will not experience so much suffering.

However, we may notice that for other individuals, as soon as they are told that they have an illness, they worry so much about it that it actually escalates the illness. This may even be a cause for other kinds of diseases that they did not have previously to manifest. That is why it is good to secure the mind.

Also, I forgot to mention earlier that when one experiences the suffering of illness, if one can actually train the mind to see it as a karmic result of one's previous deeds and also reflect on the fact that the very nature of being born in the cyclic existence means that one has to experience illness, one should not be too surprised or shocked about this situation and rather accept it. That attitude can help to minimise sufferings and worries. Also one can reflect upon the sufferings of others, and thus develop compassion for them. This can help the mind reduce its anxiety and the worry, and thus contribute to maintaining one's health. If we can train ourselves in that way, the positive attitude we develop

can actually benefit us in any kind of situation, such as an illness.

As mentioned earlier, if one has a good understanding of the law of cause and effect or karma, then in the event of experiencing an illness, one can accept it as a consequence of one's own negative deeds created in the past. We can actually feel a sense of joy about experiencing the negative consequences now, as the negative karma is exhausted we do not have to experience further, heavier negative karmic consequences later. Because, the karma is actually exhausted by our experiencing the sickness now. When we contemplate and regard our sickness in that way, we will accept our suffering willingly and see it in a positive way. For those who have a good understanding of karma, they can actually practise it in that way. It is said when one willingly takes on one's own suffering and sees it as a means to purify one's negative karma, in reality a great amount of negative karma is actually purified. Because of one's attitude, experiencing the illness becomes a means to purify very heavy negative karma that one has created in the past. This is why there is a saying in our tradition that if you sick, then at least make the sickness worthwhile.

The third suffering in relation to the illness is that there is no desire for attractive things. As the commentary explains, desirable things harm those who are sick and one cannot indulge in them freely. This is something we can all relate to. When we experience a certain kind of illness, we would be told by doctors and others that we have to refrain from certain kinds of food and certain activities. Even though we may have a wish to have that food, we are told that it would make our illness worse, so involuntarily we have to refrain from food we normally like. Further, one does not have the range of movements and activities that one would wish. The normal activities that we like to engage in have to be restricted or avoided – again, as a precaution.

Also, one has to engage in things one does not wish for. This is related to the fourth suffering of illness, which is that you have to unwillingly engage with unpleasant objects. This means the sick are forced to take unpalatable medicine, food, drinks and the like, and have to rely on harsh therapies. In relation to unpalatable medicines, there are certain kinds of herbal medication that taste bitter and unpalatable. However, one has to drink them as part of one's treatment. One may not normally want to drink it, but because of one's illness, one has to. Harsh therapies involve such things as being burnt with fire e.g. moxibustion and being penetrated with instruments. In modern times, when we are ill, we may have to have injections; having needles pierce us is not something we would normally want to have. If we have to undergo surgery, parts of our body have to be cut open, which again is something we would not normally wish for, but because of the illness, if we wish to become better, we have to undergo such treatments, albeit unwillingly.

The fifth suffering in relation to illness is that one loses one's life force or vital energy, and it is painful to realise that one's illness is terminal.

What is not included in these five categories but which other texts mention is that one of the sufferings in relation

to illness is the suffering of diminishing wealth. In the Tibetan tradition when someone was ill, besides having to pay doctors and medications, lots of money would also be spent doing ritual or ceremonial offerings with the hope of removing one's illness. In the west, we know that if someone were to get ill, they would have to spend so much money from their savings for medications and treatments.

Having reflected on these obvious sufferings of illness, it is also good to remind ourselves to take care of our health by avoiding certain harmful foods and other substances that harm one's body and to use one's wealth now to eat good, nutritious food, which can help us to maintain our health. If we pay attention our health, it can really minimise a lot of unnecessary suffering. Normally, I like to mention half-jokingly that if I had a choice between something palatable and very tasty but which might harm my health, and something that does not taste so good but is good for the health, I would choose the food that is not so tasty but better for the health, because even if you eat something that is tasty and nice, it will obviously harm you. Then there is no benefit from it; one would have to suffer much more later on.

We may have time for one or two questions if you have any before we end the session. You may raise your hands if you have any. The question may be related to this evening's teaching or anything you may have doubts about. If there are no questions, maybe that's a good sign you have understood everything and it is clear!

We will conclude for the evening and spend a few minutes in meditation. This time, as we sit in a proper relaxed posture, we will be focusing on the sound of the mantra of Buddha Shakyamuni. This time, we keep our attention on the sound of the mantra as the mantra is being recited.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version
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