
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual, it would be good to spend some time for meditation sitting in an upright comfortable position. Normally, the purpose of meditation is to acquaint our mind with developing a kind attitude. One begins by focusing on an internal object and repeatedly drawing one's mind back to that particular object. In that way one can train one's mind.

By focusing on an internal object, we naturally distance our mind from external distractions because as long as the mind is outwardly focused it can become disturbed. The more we focus on an internal object, the less the mind will be influenced by the external distractions and the mind will naturally become more settled and clear. As the mind becomes clearer, the space and clarity within one's mind will result in accessing a higher form of intelligence within oneself. From the Buddhist perspective, a higher intelligence is the wisdom to discriminate between what is beneficial and what is harmful. That analytical wisdom will naturally allow us to follow what is beneficial for ourselves, to bring beneficial results in our life.

Whereas, for as long as we allow our mind to be distracted, there will not be much clarity and hence it will be difficult to achieve that beneficial intelligence. Rather, we will have another kind of intelligence which seems to bring more confusion and problems for ourselves. Thus, the benefit from meditation is to enable us to develop a beneficial wisdom which we can use in our daily life.

Having described the benefits of meditation, we may doubt whether someone engaged in meditation is always focussed inwardly and is completely disconnected with the outside world? That of course is not the case. Contrary to being disconnected from the outside world, someone who regularly practises focusing internally actually relates to the outside world in a far healthier and more constructive way.

In a distracted state of mind, when we relate with the outside world, we become completely influenced by what we perceive with our five senses. To give an example: the moment we see a beautiful object our mind is immediately influenced to become unsettled and excited. Likewise when we hear a beautiful sound, it excites the mind which becomes agitated and disturbed. It is similar with beautiful smells, nice, smooth tactile feelings and pleasant tastes. When we come into contact with external objects they stimulate our senses, excite our mind and we become agitated. We don't feel restful. Our mind becomes disturbed.

Conversely, when a person is progressing in meditation and is able to focus inwardly, when such a person relates with the outside world and sees beautiful sights, it does

not affect their mind to the extent of becoming excited and disturbed. Likewise with other sense objects, sounds, tastes and smells will not disturb the mind to such a great extent. We will be able to relate to external events in a much more positive way.

When a person is beginning meditation practise, the teachings advise that it can be useful to go into solitude because the mind is so easily influenced by distractions. A beginner is unable to focus very well. So for beginners, solitude can be conducive. As one progresses and reaches a certain level of confidence, and is more able to deal with objects of distraction, the practitioner can come to where there are more people because their mind is more able to deal with objects which would normally distract them. A person meditating on non-attachment for example, has been repeatedly meditating on the faults of desire and with a certain level of confidence they can come out into the world and into contact with beautiful objects and they should not be disturbed. Their minds are already familiar with the disadvantages of objects of desire and attachment and they are not affected by contact with those objects.

Similarly, someone who has been meditating on love and compassion can come into contact with an object of aversion and not feel anger or aversion but rather, would be able to feel compassion and love because of the familiarity they have with those attitudes. In this way, one can see the benefits of meditation practise and how, when one reaches a certain level, one is able to interact even more effectively with the outside world. So there are really great benefits to be gained for our mind by practising internal focus.

Those already acquainted with the practise of meditation will experience a great lessening in the things that would normally worry or upset them. From a worldly, conventional perspective, it might seem that people who don't have many worries are seen as simpletons or just weird. Particularly not to worry when there are difficulties in one's own family may be seen as a careless person. However someone who is apparently not affected by worries may have reached a certain authentic level of understanding, so that their genuine response is 'What use is there in worrying, it will not help solve the problems within the family. Rather, it harms me and harms the others, so it is better to be happy and to maintain one's sanity and the happiness in one's mind.'

When we look into the practical situation of dealing with problems, we do find that someone completely immersed in anxieties and worries has a closed mind and that sort of mind is not conducive in helping others, let alone themselves. Someone completely consumed by worry cannot help others solve problems because their mind is fully burdened with anxieties. Yet, someone who has a mind free of anxiety; a light, happy mind and a good attitude, is able to help others. There is a phrase that describes this state: 'In order to help others, one first has to be free from worries and have a happy mind oneself'.

Having explained the advantages of developing a focused mind that uses an internal object, we can now spend some time using our breath as the object to focus on. As mentioned earlier, in order to derive benefit from

our meditation practise, we must develop a keen determination to put 100 per cent effort and energy into the practise and that means actively deciding that one's mind will not be distracted with objects that can otherwise excite the five senses. We withdraw our mind from the objects of sensual indulgence and bring it inward to focus on the breath itself, which is an object that is neutral. It is shapeless, colourless and yet, it is something we can still relate to. We simply focus on the breath coming in and out and that can really help the mind to settle. We will do that for the next few minutes. *(Pause for meditation)*

There are two particular objects of distraction I forgot to mention. They are that men should not focus on beautiful women and that women should not focus on beautiful men. Both of these objects of distraction normally do bring a lot of disturbance to the mind. There are actually 10 features of distraction, but I have mentioned only six.

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 longs 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 actual sufferings of cyclic existence

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.1.2.1.2 Reflecting on the six sufferings

From the text we are currently considering the general topic of contemplating the faults or sufferings of cyclic existence. The general sufferings of cyclic existence can be divided into six types of sufferings or faults. We have covered the six types, and now the text mentions how these six can be combined into three types of sufferings that we can reflect on over and over again.

- Firstly, in cyclic existence there is no secure base that you can count on.
- Secondly, however much that you may indulge in pleasures they will not bring satisfaction.
- Thirdly, you have been caught in cyclic existence from beginningless time.

As one reflects upon the sufferings and sees them as being faults, one will become more attuned to recognising these faults as being sufferings to the extent that our mind will develop a keen disenchantment towards the so-called pleasures of cyclic existence. We will develop the wish to be free from cyclic existence. And that is the benefit.

The **first fault** is also subdivided into four parts: The first part is that there is no security in obtaining a body, for you have discarded bodies repeatedly. Even when one obtains the body that one now has, there is no security in it. In other words, one cannot keep this body for too long. One has to eventually part with this body. That is the reality. Even if one were to obtain a body like this again in the future, one will have to discard it again. Contemplating this fact helps the mind to reduce excessive attachment to the body and minimizes suffering

which occurs due to strong attachment to the body. Such contemplation can be very beneficial.

The second subdivision in relation to uncertainty is that there is no security in agents of help or harm for they are not certain. This relates to people one feels close to in this lifetime such as one's father and mother who can become enemies in other lifetimes. By the reverse, enemies in this lifetime can become close relatives in future lives. By reflecting how there is no certainty in one's relationships and considering how - over lifetimes - friends and enemies are interchangeable, excessive attachment towards close friends or relatives can be reduced and our aversion towards enemies can be overcome. One does not even need to go into the past or future lives to reflect on the reality of this situation because even in this lifetime we can talk about certain years or days when things change and someone we consider our best friend yesterday can today turn out to be someone we completely disagree with and consider an enemy.

When one reflects that there is no certainty between friends and strangers and enemies when situations like this do occur, it would not affect the mind to feel shock and hurt but rather, one will be able to accept the situation through understanding that that is the reality of cyclic existence. So, for someone who has acquainted their mind with these practises and attitudes, rather than feeling suffering in their mind when friends turn into enemies and so forth, one can use such situations as opportunities to enhance their understanding of the reality of the teachings.

When such situations occur it will bring the reality to the mind of a practitioner even more strongly of how 'whoever is born into cyclic existence is under the influence of delusions and karma and that a contaminated body and mind is in the nature of suffering'. Further, that we will experience those sufferings over and over again. Bringing that truth to one's mind enhances one's determination to be free from sufferings and to strive to obtain liberation. Such understanding can be a means to enhance one's practise. And yet, developing these attitudes does not come about immediately. They occur gradually through familiarising oneself with the teachings and by trying to put the understanding into practise. In this way we can slowly feel the benefits.

As the mind becomes familiar with particular practises such as non-attachment and aversion and the recognition that the very nature of being in cyclic existence means there is no certainty between friends, enemies and strangers, when such interchanges do occur and a friend suddenly turns into an enemy or a stranger, or an enemy turns into a friend, it would not affect the mind to the degree of experiencing shock, hurt and depression because one already has that understanding and sees it as a reality.

There are people who have confided in me about the suffering they have experienced when they are separated from a loved one. The sufferings are so great and deep that uncontrollable tears come when they go to bed. They tell me they cannot stop the tears and end up with wet pillows. Such situations are not random, occurring only

to some, but can in fact happen to anyone. Since these situations can happen to anyone at anytime, one must be prepared and know how to deal with such occurrences. Familiarising oneself with the teachings and practising and meditating is the way to prepare for such situations so that we are not affected in a negative way.

In this life we can see that there are so many changes which occur in relationships. However, a fact which is noteworthy to point out is that relationships with one's parents and relatives are something that goes beyond normal relationships with unrelated others. Even though there may be difficulties with one's parents or relatives, the fact is that one's mum will always remain as one's mum, and one's dad will always remain one's dad. Similarly with relatives; one's brothers or sisters will always remain one's brothers or sisters. So even though the relationships may be strained or difficult there is still the sense that my mum and dad and my brothers and sisters will always remain so it is hard for them to become like sworn enemies who you can completely kick out of your life. There will always be some sort of unique connection with these people which is why I stress the necessity of maintaining harmony and good relationships with one's family.

In contrast, with other relationships such as someone we once considered as very dear and may have married and later divorced and now call 'ex-husband or ex-wife', that connection does not remain. The very change in the term shows that there is a difference in that connection.

The third subdivision from the first category relates to worldly conditions such as status: What is high can become low. This suffering or fault relates to the uncertainty of status. What is considered to be high can, at any given moment, become lowly. There are certain people who may have great riches, beautiful houses, beautiful food and servants who care for them, but, at any given time when situations change, they can fall down to the lowest or poorest situations. Someone like a ruler who has great power and wealth, can lose all the status of power and wealth and be imprisoned in a small cell. One can imagine the tremendous sufferings someone like that would undergo with that change of situation. Yet, someone familiar with teachings who can reflect upon how there is no certainty and how present conditions can be lost at any moment because of the realities of cyclic existence, will be able to deal with their changed circumstances with a right attitude and their minds will not be affected by tremendous sufferings. Rather, such changes will enhance their practise.

A particular instance of this is the late Saddam Hussein who once had palaces but later had to experience a low situation. Images were shown of him being extracted from a humble hiding place under the ground. He came out of his hiding place with an unkempt beard looking very weak. It was a shocking image of a person who once had much wealth and power but who then found himself in such a distressing situation that it actually brought much spontaneous love, pity and compassion towards him. One felt really sorry for him because a once great ruler was now in such a very poor situation where he looked so miserable. The misery on his face brought

about much compassion and pity. Of course, that same person had been a dictator who had inflicted immense harm upon others, so it was hard to feel pity and compassion for him. There was the danger of feeling anger towards him because of what he had done. However, when such a person is in a very lowly, miserable situation compassion and pity does arise spontaneously. Doesn't it?

The fourth subdivision is that there is no security in companionship and that you can find yourself without any companions. At the time of death we will have to leave even our closest friends or relatives.

As the teachings mention, by reflecting on these points over and over again, one will be instilled with a keen sense of detachment towards cyclic existence and will thus develop a keen interest in seeking liberation. Here the text refers to being reborn again and again and that in those rebirths there is no security in attaining wonderful conditions. By reflecting on these facts over and over again, it will bring about a strong disenchantment towards the pleasures of cyclic existence.

We will conclude here this evening. But let us again take a few moments to engage in meditation. By sitting in an appropriate posture we bring our mind inward and focus on the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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