
The Condensed Lam Rim

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It would be good to spend some time in meditation. For that purpose, find an appropriate posture that is upright and straight but also relaxed. It is good to sit upright but also try not to be too tense and be a little bit relaxed.

The goal of contemplation is to train our mind to be able to focus without any distraction and ultimately achieve single-pointed concentration. In order to reach that goal one needs to first withdraw one's mind from distractions such as the conceptual thoughts we have in our mind. This refers to discursive random mundane thoughts. We withdraw our mind from these and any other distractions that are related to our five senses. Then, having chosen an internal object, we try to maintain our focus on that object.

As we engage in the practice of meditation and focus our mind on the internal object, we begin to notice that the mind naturally calms down and becomes tranquil and peaceful. We can learn something very important and gain a higher intelligence from that experience. We can learn that a discursive mind, a mind that is always following different thoughts and being influenced by all these distractions, is a mind that is full of worries, anxiety and thus is an unhappy mind.

As we experience the mind becoming more settled and naturally calmer and happier we can then identify what disturbs our mind. Our mind is unhappy and confused when it is completely distracted and randomly following all of the different conceptual thoughts. That is what we learn. If we allow our minds to be influenced by all the different conceptual thoughts that arise in our mind then the more we have different kinds of thoughts and the more we allow our mind to be influenced by them, the more the mind is disturbed and lacks real contentment and peace. If we withdraw our mind and our mind is more focused, less influenced by these thoughts, then the mind is naturally less worried and as a consequence is much calmer and peaceful.

When we actually look into our normal lives we notice that people have many different thoughts and many different plans but no real constructive goal. People who have many different thoughts and ideas in their mind seem to be people who have more worries and more anxiety. That indicates, from a normal life perspective, that the mind that is distracted in that way is a worried mind, a mind that is unsettled.

We can learn more from our experience of gaining some effect from meditation. We can begin to notice and realise for ourselves that it is possible to train our mind. Training our mind to be more focused in a positive way results in more calmness to the mind. When the mind is more focused we have more ability to maintain a positive mind and that positive outlook in life will help to maintain a tranquil, happy mind.

If we are more aware of ourselves, of our attitudes, we will come to notice that sometimes a situation depends on how

we view it. Whether a situation affects you or not depends very much on your attitude. How we think about a situation can make us feel anxious and it becomes a big problem for us. Whereas if we look at it from a different angle, or a different point of view, the situation may not appear as such a big problem. That shows that our experience is very much related to our attitudes. If we develop a positive attitude in our mind it can help to overcome many different problems for ourselves. In this way, as we learn from our own experience, we can train our mind. It is our responsibility to train our mind and we can do it.

The benefits of the external knowledge we can gain by observing others with worldly skills and knowledge, are obvious. We can see, by observing others who are successful and work hard and so forth, that they get good mundane results. So we follow their example, which is something that we can do. We can see they are examples and proof of that approach.

Unlike the obvious, external worldly well-being that can be achieved through worldly knowledge, internal development is something that is very hard to immediately notice in others and within oneself. But with training and the experience that you get from even a short meditation, you can develop within yourselves an affirmation that the real internal happiness within one's mind is developed from within oneself and that this is something that it is possible to achieve. In that way we really begin to get some valuable intelligence, and real wisdom within ourselves. That would be a suitable thing to achieve.

As the great meditators have mentioned, one learns from one's experience and practice of meditation that there is something worthwhile that we can achieve. We can definitely notice within ourselves that as we progress in the ability to focus inward, we are able to distance ourselves from all the different distractions, the discursive thoughts, and the conceptual thoughts that arise in the mind. We are able to distance ourselves and maintain our inward focus and not allow the mind to be influenced by all the discursive thoughts. As we are able to manage that then, to that degree, we would begin to notice that when we meet with certain external conditions they cause us to either feel strong desire or aversion.

As soon as we have contact with certain objects, we may have strong desire for them or we may develop aversion. Sometimes when we meet with certain conditions they may bring a lot of sorrow in our mind - we may feel unhappy, really burdened and heavy. Then sometimes, when certain conditions change and become a little bit better, we might experience the other extreme of the mind being overly excited.

One would notice as one develops one's meditation practice, one is not as affected by those extreme states of mind, even when one meets with those conditions that previously would have affected us in such an intense way.

We all notice through our own experience that sometimes it just takes just the slightest change in a situation to affect our mind. From feeling very elated, happy, excited and exuberant at one moment, then the condition may change slightly and we can suddenly feel very depressed and unhappy. That is something that is dependent on our attitudes. The more we allow our mind to be influenced by all the discursive thoughts, ideas and attitudes that arise in our mind, and our mind to be distracted in that way, the more external conditions will affect us. Conversely, when we are able to maintain the focus of our mind we will come to

notice that even when we meet with these external conditions it will not affect us to a great degree. That is the progress the great masters have mentioned that we will notice through our practice.

The experience that we gain from the practice of meditation and the access that we have to these practices is not something that is dependent on having a religious commitment. It does not depend on whether one considers oneself religious or not. Meditation is not strictly a religious practice. It is more of a practical practice that can benefit any one. In other words, one need not consider oneself as a member of any particular religion, Buddhist or any other particular denomination, in order to benefit from a practice like this. A practice such as focusing inwards and meditating is something that is accessible to anyone who wishes to practise it. The benefits that one gets from this are something that will be experienced directly. The benefits do not depend on having faith in a religion, rather as one practises according to the technique, the benefit is experienced by oneself. This is something that one will be able to gauge for oneself through one's own experience.

In this way we can see that meditation definitely has great benefit and is definitely accessible to anyone who wishes to benefit from it. By training in this way and transforming our mind from a very distracted, easily influenced, vulnerable state to a more focused, controlled, contained state will help in our everyday situations, particularly with relationships. If you are living with someone that relationship will change, will become much more harmonious, because of one's own practice. One will be able to withstand difficult situations when they arise.

I often mention and remind people that no relationship is an easy one. There is no relationship that is perfect, that is without difficulties and problems. That is unrealistic, beyond reality. A relationship means that there are bound to be difficulties and problems. How one reacts to that is dependent on each individual. We know that in relationships it is not the case that your partner will always have a smiling, joyful face. There will be times when your partner is facing difficulties and they will have a frown on their face, a face that does not seem pleased. If one doesn't have control over one's own mind that will then affect one. Your partner's attitude and state of mind can very much influence your own state of mind and you might react negatively towards them. Whereas if one has a controlled mind oneself then one can actually help the other when they are experiencing difficulty by maintaining one's cool and not allowing oneself to be affected by their reactions. One can then influence them to be in a better state of mind and thus that relationship is maintained and ultimately it will be a good companionship.

It is similar with any other kind of relationship. If we can control our mind so that it does not get affected by others' remarks or attitudes and so forth, then that will maintain our own sanity, our own peace of mind. Ultimately it is dependent on how we deal with our own mind, which is within our own control. This is something that will also benefit us on a practical level, if we train accordingly.

The practical way to see the benefit of the practice of meditation is to acknowledge the immediate benefits from meditation. When we give the power to our thoughts then those thoughts influence our mind in a negative way and we are affected.

The practice of meditation is training our mind not to be influenced by the distractions that arise. As we practise that

we will become familiar with it. Right now the reason we are affected by the different discursive conceptual thoughts, is because we are already familiar with them, and thus familiar with allowing our mind to be distracted. That is what our mind is already used to. When we are distracted our mind is influenced by all sorts of negative thoughts that arise and overpower us and cause us to feel depressed, frustrated and so forth.

Once we train our mind and become familiar with maintaining our focus, we will be under the positive influence of our mind maintaining oneself. Even when discursive thoughts and so forth arise one will be able to contain oneself and not allow the mind to be influenced. In that way one can see the benefit.

The benefit, as mentioned earlier, can be gauged through the experiences that one gains from one's practice. The real experience that we are relating to is an experience where the mind is not just contained during the few minutes of meditation. That is something that we can all manage. It is quite possible during a few minutes of meditation to withdraw our mind and focus on the breath and we will not be too influenced and distracted by the negative states, the delusions, within ourselves.

The real test, however, is when we come out of formal meditation and are out in the world engaging with others in daily life. That is when we have to gauge whether our practice is successful or not and whether there has been some benefit from our practice or not. If, as soon as we come out of meditation, our mind suddenly goes into a completely chaotic state, which means it is completely vulnerable and easily affected by whatever is happening around oneself, then that shows that one's practice has not been really successful. To give a particular example, if one finds that upon coming out of a few minutes of meditation (or whatever time one spends on meditation), when one goes out into the world and sees an attractive object one feels attachment and desire for that object and one's mind is completely influenced and sucked in by that object, it shows that the few minutes of meditation may have been worthwhile for that time but have not had a good effect on our actual, everyday life.

Whereas, we can begin to notice after having practiced for a certain amount of time that we have a different reaction when we meet with objects of strong desire that previously we were completely overpowered, immersed and indulged in. At a minimum our mind is not as easily influenced and at best one does not feel desire towards that object any more and the mind is completely self-contained. One meets with the same object of desire that one had previously met but it does not affect one's mind. One does not become overly excited and completely overpowered by the object. If one notices this then this is the real sign of progress in our meditation.

If there has been a positive, concrete result of our practice the sign is not shown by anyone else but by oneself. One begins to notice for oneself that there has been an improvement in oneself and that the positive result of meditation is to subdue the mind. If one begins to notice that one's mind is subdued then that is the positive result of meditation. Otherwise it becomes a joke. We are just doing meditation for a few minutes and we feel O.K. but when we come out and we are completely distracted again.

Initially we use the breath as an internal object to focus upon. So, let us again remind ourselves to sit in a comfortable, upright position and withdraw our mind from

all external and internal distractions, completely withdrawing our mind and not allowing it to be influenced by these distractions. We maintain our focus one hundred percent on the breath. We will spend the next few minutes focused 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 strains 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

The text has explained the six types of suffering and how these are condensed into three and then four. We have gone over all those explanations.

The text now explains that when strong attachment arises within oneself and we experience some pleasure from that, the pleasure that we experience is only a pleasure because it removes an earlier suffering. It is not, however, a real, intrinsic pleasure by its very nature. It is, in other words, another form of suffering but because it alleviates an earlier intense suffering it is experienced as being pleasurable. The contaminated pleasures that we experience are experienced as pleasure only because they replace an earlier unpleasant sensation, feeling. We experience pleasure but in reality it is contaminated. It is not real pleasure in its own nature.

The text goes on to further illustrate this. When, for example, one experiences the unpleasantness of being tired, what we call suffering, from having walked for a long, long distance and we take a rest that would be experienced initially as pleasure because of the fact that the suffering of walking has ceased, but that pleasant feeling that we experience when we rest is not real pleasure.

The reason why it is not intrinsically real pleasure when one is resting, is because of the fact that if we sit and rest for too long then we will start to feel uncomfortable and unpleasant. If that were real pleasure then the more we sit, the more we rest, the more pleasure we should experience. But our experience is contrary to that. As we rest for too long, we begin to feel unpleasant.

The text then says, 'as the earlier intense suffering fades, pleasure appears to arise gradually yet sitting is not naturally pleasant because if you sit too long suffering arises again just as before'. The text further explains, 'suppose that sitting and other postures were causes of pleasure by their very nature, just as suffering increases in proportion to your involvement with causes of suffering, so should pleasure increase the longer you walk, sit, lie down, drink or eat or stand in the sun or shade.' However it is clear that if you do any of these things for too long, suffering is all that results.' As explained quite clearly here, whatever pleasurable experience we have initially, being a contaminated pleasure, it is not a real source of pleasure, and it will result in unpleasantness.

That is also true for relationships. Initially when we have a good friend, a good partner, we feel very excited and joyful with them, we feel very pleasant. But, as we spend more time with them we begin to see their other side and suddenly we start to feel uncomfortable, don't we?

The text explains this is definitely the case through examples

such as sunbathing. We consider sunbathing as something pleasurable but we all know that if we stay in the sun for too long it starts to feel uncomfortable. We start to burn and feel very unpleasant after a while and we want to go into the shade. When we go into the shade the initial experience of coolness feels pleasurable. We take that as being pleasurable, but according to the teaching, the reason we experience that as being pleasurable is because the intense suffering of feeling too hot has been removed. The coolness we experience then is experienced as being pleasurable. But if it were a real cause of pleasure then the more we sit in the cool shade the more the pleasure should increase. But, as we all notice, after a certain time of being in the cool shade we start to feel uncomfortable.

This is true for any kind of contaminated pleasure that we experience in samsara or cyclic existence with our contaminated aggregates. It is true, for example, of eating and drinking. We all know that eating is considered pleasurable and we spend a lot of time cooking and having good food. But if eating were real pleasure then the more we eat in one instance the more pleasure we would have to experience. If eating itself was a cause for real pleasure then the more we ate the more the pleasure should increase. But, as we all know, rather than pleasure increasing we start to feel quite uncomfortable if we continue to eat. In fact there are many people who die from overeating and there are people who die from drinking too.

This is also true of lying down and sleeping. We would consider that as pleasurable but there are those who complain that if they sleep too long they feel uncomfortable in bed and they can't sleep for too long and they have to get up again. That clearly indicates that any kind of contaminated pleasures that we experience, though we call them pleasure and pleasant, are in reality in their very nature not really the cause of happiness and pleasure, and in fact are in the nature of suffering.

The teachings explain that it is the reality of the nature of our existence that as long as we are in cyclic existence with our contaminated aggregates, whatever pleasure we experience is in fact, in its intrinsic nature, not real pleasure but suffering. We can come to experience and realise for ourselves, as explained in the teachings, that the suffering that we experience in samsara intrinsically has the nature of suffering; what we call a painful experience is always painful; what we call pleasure is not in its very nature real pleasure, but it actually changes into suffering. However we fail to notice that and thus we are attached to pleasure and we seek pleasure, which is what keeps us in the cycle.

The purpose of the teaching here is to instil an awareness within oneself that the so-called pleasures that we experience are not real pleasures. One should not completely indulge oneself in that and should begin to develop a keen sense of overcoming even the pleasures in samsara. We have, of course, a natural wish to overcome the suffering and the painful experiences that we have, but even the pleasurable experiences that we have are to be abandoned, avoided and overcome. That intention to overcome the pleasures, to avoid or abandon the pleasures, can only arise with the awareness that it is not real pleasure, that it is in fact in the nature of suffering, and the cause of more suffering.

As the teachings explain, it is very difficult for us as ordinary persons to develop a sense of renunciation or detachment to pleasure. To recognise painful experiences as suffering is something that we all naturally can do but, recognising

pleasurable experiences as being in the nature of suffering and developing an intention to abandon that does not arise easily. It is the same for neutral feelings that are experienced as neither pleasure or suffering. We are attached to that sort of neutral feeling as well. It is hard for us to give it up, to develop a sense of renunciation based on that.

Contemplating this reality again and again can bring about, as a practical result for oneself, less desire or attachment for the objects of pleasure. The indulgence in pleasure can be minimised because we recognise it as being not real pleasure. That recognition or awareness itself will reduce strong attachment.

We could conclude here but if anyone has any questions you may raise your hand.

(Question) Can one learn anything from relationships or are they something to be avoided?

If living with someone were to be real pleasure then the more you engage in the relationship on a desire level then the more it will bring pleasure. But is that the case from your experience? As you rightly say yourself it depends on the relationship. If the relationship is based solely on gratification of the sensual pleasures from either side, then that relationship is bound to have a lot of difficulties and problems. The consequence would be that at one time when you are together it seems that there is some sort of nice feeling but the next day, or a later part of the same day, some expression from either side will bring about a lot of aversion and anger in each other. The relationship will always be fluctuating from feeling elated and very pleasant and nice at one moment to an aversion towards each other at other moments.

On the other hand, if the relationship is not based solely on desire and attachment, but rather a real attitude of compassionate unconditional love and a sense of caring for each other, though there may be some difficulties and problems, then that sort of relationship will maintain itself and mutually benefit each other. What overcomes relationship difficulties is the compassion and concern one has for each other. If that is there from both sides then there is something positive one can get out of the relationship.

The reality seems to be that it is difficult for us to remain just by ourselves without any friends, without a partner. Not only ordinary people in relationships, but even meditators need friends. It is better to have friends. If, as an ordinary person, you are engaged in a relationship with someone, if you have a commitment with someone, then it is best for your mutual benefit that you try to develop real concern, and a compassionate attitude towards the other. That is something that will then be helpful for both sides. This applies to someone who is in a committed relationship and who has a mutual agreement to live together and maintain that relationship.

In a committed mutual relationship it is, of course, difficult to suggest that you do not have any desire. If it is a relationship based on a sexual engagement, then it is not possible to not initially have desire. However while desire is there and brings both together, what can be cultivated is a real sense of love and compassion for each other. The more one develops a real sense of love and compassion the more the relationship will evolve into something more meaningful. It is not as if developing love and compassion and reducing desire will harm the relationship. If the relationship is based only on mutual desire and attraction then, of course, as the desire lessens the relationship will

break apart. But after initially having desire as the basis if one works at having real love and compassion for each other, the relationship will not break up. The desire might lessen but the relationship will be maintained. This applies to people who are engaged in committed relationships.

For people who wish to seriously practice the teachings, it really seems to be the case that they should refrain from desire and sexual relationships. Such a relationship harms one's practice because it seems to really distract one. Many people have told me that when they are immersed in a desire relationship with others, their focus in meditation and everything else in relation to practice is completely distorted. It is impossible to maintain their focus, because their obsession with the sexual relationship is stronger. Thus, someone who really engages in the practice of meditation needs to slowly train the mind to overcome desire and surpass that sort of relationship.

(Question) My three year old son is hyperactive and very difficult to handle. So, I was wondering if meditation could help calm him down or is it to early to teach him meditation?

Actual formal meditation for a three year old might be expecting too much, and not be suitable. What may be really useful and needed is some discipline. When I mention discipline it does not need to be harsh. The word discipline sometimes seems to denote being a little bit hard but there are ways of disciplining a child without having to be too hard. For example, if a child is saying, 'I want to do this' or 'I want that' and you feel that what they want is not really appropriate or too expensive or whatever, then instead of saying, 'No, no, no' and shutting them off completely, which will then make them upset and angry and perhaps have a tantrum, you could coax them into having something else, saying, 'This is not possible but you can have that.' This is finding ways to contain them without having to completely restrict them.

In other words, do not completely give in to the child's wishes. It wouldn't work if you completely give in to them and give them whatever they want. That would be the extreme. To completely restrict them from everything is another extreme. Find a balance that does not let them have their own way completely. Look into what they would like and what they need and try to compromise and give them something so they feel they are not completely deprived. It seems that when you give some leeway to a child they feel that you are taking them into consideration and even a small child is able to think and listen and be more obedient to you. The main thing is not to lose it. If one loses control and gets angry, then the child will definitely react to that.

It is not practical to completely restrict a child and stop them having their way. One can use oneself as an example. If anyone were to restrict you from fulfilling your wishes would that be something you could accept? Naturally the answer would be that you could not accept that. If someone completely controls us and does not allow us what we wish to do we would not be able to accept that. Similarly, a child is also a human being who has a mind and if you completely restrict them they would not accept that just as we don't. A child also has their own mind and way of thinking. To completely restrict them would be, as mentioned earlier, an extreme but to give in to them completely is also another extreme. Try to look into the balance and see what their needs are and try to give them what they need.

Another thing that seems to be quite true is that children at that age, particularly three or four, can be quite robust. Children who are quite hyperactive at that time and age

seem to somehow cool off and actually turn out to be very good later on. There are many examples of children who are initially hyperactive and turn out to be quite self contained and happy children later on. On the other hand, it is questionable whether those who seem to be very contained, calm and peaceful in the beginning turn out to be good. They might actually turn out to be the opposite later on.

Another thing that one must look into is the reason why they are like this. Often what we might consider as hyperactive and an active mind is often an indication that they actually have a very intelligent mind. They are questioning a lot and it seems that they want to do a lot of different things because their mind is active. This is, in fact, a good sign. It means that they have an intelligent mind and that they are unable to control it so they want to do things and ask many questions and are very active. As their body is small we see them as a young child, but they have an intelligent mind. Parents might think that the child is just being obnoxious or being too demanding and completely try to restrict them and might shut off their development.

If one sees hyperactive children like this it is good to actually engage them to use their energy in a positive way. I have heard of many other children in kindergarten who ask questions and do things and talk like they are already adults. That shows that they are very intelligent. They are quite developed but they are still young and their body is small. This is not a thing to worry about but it means that you have to guide them in the right way. If parents and teachers are not aware of that then they might see the child as different, strange, uncontrollable and difficult to handle because they are talking and acting in a way more mature than their age. It is unusual and difficult to handle but, nevertheless, it should be seen as a good sign. Ultimately, you don't have to worry it will turn out fine.

That is from the practical side. From the spiritual side it seems to benefit one's child if one can recite Tara praises. The *Heart Sutra* can also help eliminate difficulties and problems. In particular, when one recites the Tara praises and the *Heart Sutra* one should visualise the Buddha and request the Buddha to bless oneself and the child, because the child and oneself are in a mutual relationship. That can definitely help. As one sits and recites the Tara praises and the *Heart Sutra* one visualises that one's own child is in front of oneself and as one does the recitation the blessing in the form of light comes from the Buddha's heart to oneself and to the child and eliminates all obstacles and hindrances. That can also definitely help.

I feel that your child is actually very mature for his age. For example, when he came into the gompa he started doing prostrations. I felt that that was a good gesture, which shows that he can follow good things. So you have trained him well in that way.

The main point is that if you explain things properly in a nice, calm way it seems that they listen. It is not as though they don't listen at all. I have noticed that as well. It seems that you need to know how to explain things to him in the right way. Being in tune with the child seems a good technique to educate children rather than distancing oneself saying, 'I am the parent and you should listen to me.' in a more traditional way. If this means you should play with the child then play some games with the child and become a friend to them. In that way you are educating them while maintaining your authority and influencing them in a positive way. That seems like a practical way to educate them.

We can conclude for the evening. There are actually a few raised arms. I apologise that we don't have time to cover all your questions. I am sure they are good questions so I apologise for not being able to answer them now.

Before we conclude the session we can just take some time to again focus inward and this time, as we distance our mind from the distractions, we focus on the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. Just spend a few minutes focused on that.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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