
The Condensed Lam Rim

ལྷན་སྐྱེས་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བརྒྱུག་པ་སྟེ།

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As usual it's good to spend some time in meditation. Normally the body should be relaxed while one tries to sit upright. It is good to reflect on the immediate benefits one gets from meditation. The immediate benefit we notice is that the very distracted, very disturbed mind subsides and the mind becomes calmer and clearer.

Now we look into what we call the faults of the distracted mind. When the mind is distracted and full of discursive thoughts, a lot of fleeting thoughts arise in the mind. We then lose our focus and direction in life because we are preoccupied with so many different ideas and thoughts that do not have much meaning, or any real essence.

We tend to lose direction in life and thus we may lose a sense of meaning in our life, such as not really being sure what is it that we are headed towards or what we want to achieve. Because of a lack of direction and meaning in life, depression may set in one's mind. If that goes on for a while then that can affect our health. Thus a very distracted mind leads to just more and more problems in our mind, which can lead to ill affects.

One of the main reasons why we lose a sense of direction and meaning in life is because our intelligence diminishes. The more distractions we have in our mind, the more we lose the wisdom or intelligence to know what is right and what is harmful to us. Thus we are led into indulgence and trying out all sorts of things, which may bring some immediate gratification, but do not really bring any real satisfaction.

So as we slowly focus inwards and settle our mind, the mind becomes clearer. As a result of the mind becoming clearer and more focussed, the intelligence and wisdom within ourselves becomes sharper. When we gain that wisdom or intelligence, we are able then to distinguish what is harmful and what is useful for ourselves, so then we can shun the harmful things and adopt what is useful for ourselves. That way our life becomes more meaningful and much more fulfilling.

When we look into the reasons why anyone, including oneself, would engage in harmful deeds or, from worldly convention, ill behaviour? We notice that there are so many people out there who we label or categorise as being people who are engaging in very negative or bad deeds. Or even with youngsters who try to experience everything and try to do things which we would consider as being not very wise and harmful. Nevertheless, we see them being drawn to those deeds seemingly having no control of themselves.

When we look into the reason why, we need to understand that every negative activity comes from a

disturbed mind, from a mind which is completely distracted and unclear, not knowing what is really meaningful and best for oneself. It leads into trying all kinds of experiences, engaging in all sort of behaviour which they seem to do quite compulsively. They don't seem to have much control and we will further look into the reasons why anyone would do that.

We can use ourselves as an example, thinking about when we engaged in harmful deeds now or in the past. When we look that and question ourselves as to why we did that, it becomes quite clear that this is because we did not know any better. And we had ideas and thoughts in our mind that something might be useful for us, or we didn't know that it was harmful. And even though sometimes we knew it was harmful, we would have engaged in it quite compulsively, because we are under the influence of our distracted mind, a mind that is completely out of focus.

As we identify the causes for our own ill deeds or misbehaviour and come to realise through one's own practise, and through gaining some courage within oneself, we begin to realise and identify why we were doing those sorts of actions. This will help us to understand why others are engaging in those actions now as well. It will also help to increase our understanding towards others; it will help us to feel a sense of real compassion for others knowing that they are doing harmful deeds and misbehaving because they don't have much control, and because their mind is disturbed. So rather than getting upset and angry towards them, one will feel compassion towards them.

If it's someone that one is not directly related to, one would at least have a feeling of how pitiful it is that they are doing actions that are harmful. Even if we cannot directly help them to stop their deeds, we would at least have a wish in our mind of how nice it would be if they could overcome those negative deeds, and we can even make prayers in our mind for them to overcome their negative deeds. The way we feel for others is a sign of compassion increasing in our mind with intelligence. Because of our intelligence, because of the wisdom of having realised what the causes are to lead others in those negative deeds, then one does feel compassion. The conclusion here is that meditation helps us to settle down our own mind, have clarity in our mind and increase the wisdom and intelligence within our own mind. At the same time, as we are engaged in meditation, we feel the benefits for oneself and it also helps us to increase compassion towards others.

As to how the technique of meditation works to help to settle our mind, it is good for us to look into how meditation helps oneself. It's not some sort of superficial idea, but in fact it really helps the mind to settle down. There is a very logical reason why the mind can settle down when we use the proper technique of meditation.

As explained earlier, the technique in meditation involves withdrawing our mind from the objects of distraction. Our mind becomes distracted because of coming into contact with thoughts of external objects and allowing our mind to be influenced by them. When we meet with the object that distracts and disturbs our mind, when we

don't withdraw our mind and allow the mind to just go along with the object that we come in contact with, then the mind becomes disturbed and there is much more turmoil in the mind.

The technique of withdrawing your mind from the object is done by choosing an internal object and focusing on that. Once we do that we will feel the immediate effect of the mind settling down. The reason why the mind settles down is because the mind is withdrawn from the objects of distraction - external objects as well as internal objects of distraction. As we focus on a neutral object like the breath, then during that time - if we do it sincerely and attentively - the mind will settle down. And we can see the immediate benefit of our own mind settling down. This encourages us to see that if we master this technique and if we can further this technique of meditation, then it will help our mind to remain more settled and balanced.

Now even with this technique, we would not be able to completely overcome our distractions. Having a tranquil and settled mind all the time is not possible initially for us as beginners. However, as we train in this technique, and if we maintain a regular practise of meditation, then the practical benefit would be that when we do come into contact with distractions, then because of our habituation, there would still be a strong compulsive tendency to be drawn to the object and be influenced by it. But because of our attempt to practise meditation, our wisdom and awareness knows that we are about to get into trouble. As we notice that, we will be able to withhold a bit, whereas previously we completely let go of our mind and were distracted, now with this practise of meditation we will be able to withhold. It will help prevent us from getting into more trouble and difficulties.

How does the object of distraction actually influence our mind to become distracted and then disturbed? Let us use a particular example such as an object of desire, an object which, as we come into contact with it, desire or attachment increases in our mind. The object of desire that we will all commonly be able to relate to and understand would be, for example for a man, an attractive women, and for a woman, an attractive man.

When one's mind has an excessive attachment to the object, and is obsessed completely with that object, then the mind is not settled, it is disturbed. There is always anxiety in the mind in relation to the object, trying to please them in whatever way possible. This unsettling disturbance of the mind will affect everyone regardless of what race they are from, how much wealth they may have, whether they have companions and friends and even children. At that moment, when the mind is completely obsessed with attachment, no one seems to be able to help them. Their mind is completely overpowered by the attachment. And so in that state of mind, that person is not really able to enjoy even the normal things which we are able to enjoy, such as food, nice environment, friends and people around them. Somehow everything else is irrelevant because their mind is so obsessed with the object of attachment. With that compulsive obsessive state of mind, there is no joy, no real pleasure.

Now I suppose many of you might already have had the experience of being in that state. When one is in that excessive state of mind of attachment, the meeting with an object of attraction, we notice that what is meant to be actually giving satisfaction and happiness and joy to one's mind in fact only brings anxiety and heaviness. Once obsessive attachment is reduced, then the mind becomes a little more relaxed and more settled. When one's sense of attraction is reduced, then there will be more space in the mind. Then one will begin to again enjoy the company of other friends, relatives and family, and even the environment and the food you have will be more enjoyable, because the mind is more relaxed.

The spiritual practice of meditation is an attempt to eventually overcome desire completely. As we progress and train our mind to distance itself from the actual obsessive attraction and desire. When it is reduced, then the mind will become more calm and peaceful. So when one begins to notice this uniquely calming and settling affect within oneself, then that becomes the proof of the benefit of the practice of meditation. One need not have to speculate on whether meditation is of benefit or not, or try to believe and think that meditation should be beneficial because someone else said so or a teacher said so, or the book said so. One may not rely on others having said something or from other sources, but rather from one's own experience one will gain the confidence that meditation is something really worthwhile and beneficial. When one gains that sort of conviction within one's own mind, then one will be stable in engaging in the practice of meditation.

So as one begins to experience that calming and settling effect within one's own mind as a result of practising meditation, then that is what we call the practise of dharma. A real dharma is when we experience the positive results of engaging in practice. That is when we get the benefit. That's when it becomes worthwhile and we can see the worthiness of the practise. We see the benefit of dharma when we experience the benefit of it within ourselves, and we can consider ourselves a follower of dharma in that way.

Having contemplated the benefits of meditation, now we can actually take some time to engage in the practice of meditation. As mentioned earlier, the technique involves intentionally withdrawing our mind from all objects of external and internal distraction. The way to do that is by having a positive or neutral alternative to focus on. In this case we choose a neutral object which is our own breath, which is something that we can relate to, because we breathe in and out every moment. So as we breathe, we focus on our breath. And in focusing on our breath, we must constantly remind ourselves not to allow the mind to be distracted with external distractions or more commonly internal distractions or thoughts of discursive conceptions in our mind. We just constantly use our awareness and mindfulness to refocus our mind on our breath for as long as we can. So that is the technique that we follow. (*Pause for meditation*)

Meditation brings out the focused mind within oneself. First of all, it is important to reflect on the disadvantages of a disturbed mind and see that all the ill effects and all

the problems that anyone experiences come from a distracted mind.

Meditation will help us to have a content mind, a mind which is not distracted or easily influenced by distraction. Through one's practise, one sees that it's definitely possible for the mind to settle down. When one gets the actual experience, even for a few moments, then there is a benefit from the practice of meditation. Through one's own experience one will feel encouraged to continue.

When we see the benefits for ourselves, then it is not as if someone else is pushing us or we have to do it because of trying to please others or whatever, but because we see the benefit ourselves, we are inspired to engage in the practice of meditation. With the actual benefit of the practice of meditation come the results, which is being able to obtain the focussed mind. We gauge our improvement in the practice of meditation by seeing how long we can keep our mind focussed on the object, not how long we can sit for in a meditative posture. That has to be clear. Initially it is not important to try and force oneself to focus for long periods of time. It is not possible because of our familiarity with the distracted state of mind.

Initially when we try to keep a focussed mind, we notice that we cannot keep it for a long time. But the main point in the practise of meditation is to try even for a few moments, to try to use all our energy in maintaining, even for a few minutes, the focussed mind. Then with that familiarity, when we continue to practise meditation, slowly we would find that our attention span to focus will increase.

We should gauge our progress of practise of meditation not in days and weeks, but in years. If last year when you started the meditation you found that you were able to focus only for a few minutes or seconds, then slowly, as you maintained the continuity of the practice, it slowly increased naturally. The important thing is to keep the continuity, even it is for a few seconds. Our ability and our span of meditation will increase. So, gauging the progress, if last year you were able to focus only for two or three minutes, then this year you might be able to focus maybe for five minutes or six minutes. And then next year you might even increase it to a few more minutes, or ten minutes. In that way, slowly you will be able to progress in your ability to focus, keeping a single pointed focus on the object of your concentration.

As I mentioned previously, the practice of meditation is definitely called a practice of dharma. The reason I emphasised this is because a practice of dharma from a Buddhist context helps to benefit our minds, which benefits us, by the ability to contain and subdue our mind. That is what we call a practice of dharma. So when we are engaged in the practise of meditation, as we notice from our own experience, the mind settles down and calms down. Even if we do it for a short few minutes, we experience the calm effect in our mind. To that extent we are practising dharma because the mind is subdued during that time. So the practice of dharma or the validity of the dharma becomes something which comes from one's own conviction. When one sees the validity of the dharma from one's own conviction, then it becomes a

really firm and stable conviction because it is not based on mere faith based on others explaining or telling us the benefits, but a faith that arises from one's own conviction through one's own experience. And in that way our faith or conviction will remain very firm.

The teachings explain that the real cause for happiness is within our own mind. That is how, through the practise of meditation one gains a peaceful mind; and thus a happy mind is produced. Our true protection, the real protector, is the dharma. The dharma is within one's mind, that's the main point.

Question: Is there attachment to rejection or not accepting something?

Abandoning something does not mean rejecting something, because the word "rejection" in English has a connotation of having an aversion or being angry about something and not wanting it, because you want to avoid it and you become upset with the thing you want to contact.

Whereas abandoning attachment or overcoming attachment, or distancing oneself from the object of attachment has a completely different connotation, it comes with wisdom.

With the analogy of a doctor giving a pill, not taking the pill wouldn't be a sign of abandoning attachment to the pill. In fact, who would want to take the pill if it's not necessary? So in that sense taking a pill wouldn't be necessary out of attachment itself. The very fact that someone has to take the pill means that they are unwell. For example, when we take medicine, the actual taking of medicine and wanting to take medicine doesn't necessarily mean there is attachment to the medicine, because there is no sense in being attached to the substance. If one can do without, that is much better. So when we take medication, even though we would prefer not to take it, we have to take it because we have an illness which we have to cure. So in order to cure the illness, we take something we don't like. Rejecting it could have other connotations. Using the analogy of taking medicine and relating it to the dharma, doctors don't give any kind of medicine they like to the patient but they prescribe medicine according to what sickness the patient has. The doctor cannot give the same medicine to every patient, because each patient has their own particular ailment and disease. Similarly, it's said that the Buddhist teachings are not given as one tailored form of teaching to all students, but there are different levels of teachings which are suited to the different needs of the students. So in that way, the Buddha giving his teaching is likened to a doctor giving medicine to the needy patient.

When someone says something that I take offence at, I would like to know the attachment to the "I" or me. Although logically I can understand the meaning of "I", but I take offence because I'm so attached to this "me". So I would like to know how to lessen the attachment of "me".

According to the teaching, of course the ultimate technique is said to be realising selflessness or emptiness to overcome the grasping to the self completely. However, initially when we are not trained or don't have

much training yet in the understanding of what selflessness means, then at the beginners level what seems to be most practical and useful is to contemplate again and again the disadvantages of attachment and aversion and anger, and how being excessively attached to something or excessively averse to something leads to more problems for oneself. So when criticism comes, initially contemplating the disadvantages of attachment and aversion and anger, we realise that in reality the object of attachment does not have much of an effect on oneself. When others criticise us, it is only when we allow ourselves to be hurt that we get hurt. The words only have an affect if we allow them to affect us.

There are two sides from whatever experiences we have in relation to objects. First we develop a liking to that object, and then that will produce an attachment to the object. When attachment develops, that leads us into the many complications previously mentioned. But when the object of an aversion arises, such as someone criticising us, from our own side, we first of all develop a dislike to what is being said or mentioned. Then from that dislike arises anger within one's mind. So the initial liking or disliking which leads to attachment and anger, arises within oneself. So when someone criticises us, then we should contemplate on the reason. There is no real reason to dislike it and if we think about it like this, then the anger will not arise in one's mind. It's like developing indifference to whatever they say, not letting it affect oneself.

Likewise with objects of attachment. That like or dislike which arises within oneself that initially leads to either attachment or aversion, actually stems from a strong sense of grasping at the self. The root comes from that grasping at the self. That initial grasping is a feeling we can identify within ourselves as a strong sense of importance of one's needs, like having been very self-centred and focussed upon oneself and considering everything else in relation to whether it's good or bad for me and how it affects me. And so everything is immediately rejected just on the basis that "I don't like it". Or trying to immediately adopt something or take something for oneself because of the reason that "I like it". So "I like" or "I dislike" comes from a strong sense of grasping at the "I" itself. So that grasping of the "I" comes because of the misconception we have in relation to the "I" or the self. The misconception is that we see or we view the "I" as being an independent entity which does not relate to anything else. Like a very solid single entity which exists in itself, a very solid independent entity which is viewed as "I" or the self. So we hold on or grasp to that, and we call that the grasping to the self.

So initially in trying to overcome the excessive attachment to pleasurable things and developing strong aversion to what seems to be unpleasant things that is something which we naturally have within ourselves through our familiarity. When we seem to experience something pleasurable, we naturally develop a strong attachment to that, such as others praising us or saying nice things or giving us gifts and so forth. Whereas we naturally develop an aversion to unpleasant things, including people saying unpleasant things and so forth. To overcome a worldly concern, one first of all trains

one's mind to come to a state of equilibrium, where the positive or negative things that people say to us don't affect us either way. We reach that state first and then after that we try to train our mind further to develop a state of mind where we feel uncomfortable when pleasant things happen to ourselves, and we begin to like unpleasant things which happen to ourselves. When unpleasant things happen to us, actually what is happening is we are experiencing the results of previous negative karma that we have created. So when unpleasant things happen to us, it is nothing else but the exhausting negative karma or experiencing negative karma. And so when we experience pleasurable things, then the cause will induce attachment, and it will be a cause of further negative karma.

When others praise us and we feel elated and excited about that, then attachment to that praise becomes a cause for creating further negative karma. So that is to be avoided. So when pleasant things happen, you have a dislike towards that because you don't want to be attached to that. So when unpleasant things happen, you're joyful and happy because we are exhausting the negative karma that we have created in the past. For example, if you had something which you don't like, you will be glad when it is used up, because then you can replace it with something that you like. Similarly with negative karma, when we are experiencing ill effects or negative problems in our life, it is actually using up our negative karma, so we should be glad about it. So the quicker we use up our negative karma, the better it will be for us later on.

This practice boils down to the main practice of overcoming attachment and aversion, because the hardest attachment arises within ourselves when we come into contact with pleasurable things. The fleeting pleasures that we experience from the pleasurable object is what increases attachment within ourselves, whereas the unpleasant feelings that we experience in coming into contact with objects of aversion is what increases anger within ourselves. So in this practice we are trying to overcome the object itself which induces attachment and anger within us.

Before we conclude for the evening, we spend a few moments again in meditation, this time focussing on the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha's Shakyamuni mantra. So we keep our mind focussed on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version*

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