
The Condensed Lam Rim

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5 December 2007

As usual, it would good to spend some time in meditation. So, let us sit in an upright and relaxed posture. However, as I stress regularly, just sitting in an upright relaxed posture is not enough, one must make sure to settle down the mind as well.

The main factor in meditation is to withdraw our mind from distractions and keep it focussed on a particular object. If the mind is in turmoil and completely distracted, then one's meditation does not become really fruitful. In other words, if we allow the mind to be distracted, it does not become an authentic meditation practice. As the great master Atisha mentioned in one of his works, 'When one is alone, make sure to check one's mind'. We notice that when we sit alone by ourselves, the moment we try to be calm it seems that many more thoughts arise in our minds, sometimes to a point where we can't sit still any longer. We might get an urge to get up and do something, because suddenly some sort of idea or plan comes up in our mind. That is how we get influenced by the distracted mind.

One of the immediate goals of practising meditation is to get a rest from our very busy and distracted worldly life. We notice that just being relaxed physically does not really make us feel relaxed mentally. In order to bring rest to our mind, which is one of the goals of meditation, we need to have a mind focussed away from the distractions that are making our mind so busy. The problem is that we might have our physical posture under control, but we have not yet brought our mind under control, and so we do not have a subdued mind.

The proper approach for meditation is to find a relaxed and subdued physical posture, as well as a relaxed and subdued state of mind. The combination of a relaxed and subdued physical posture and a subdued and relaxed mind can definitely bring about a positive result in our life, both immediate and long term positive results. As for the immediate result, it seems that if we are able to really begin to relax our mind, then it has a very sound effect on our physical body. In fact, there are many who find that doing a particular meditation (which is a mental exercise) has benefited them by reducing and overcoming certain diseases. Some people have chronic diseases that have actually been cured through meditation. That is something which is possible. We can see that there is definitely a strong relationship between our mind and our physical body.

Conversely, if we don't have a subdued mind we might be in a relaxed and subdued physical posture for meditation, but the mind is not settled. The mind could be completely distracted externally while the physical

body is sitting here. We need to bring our minds into focus. We do this by withdrawing our mind from the external and internal distractions that keep our mind busy. Withdrawing means that we intentionally don't allow our mind to be influenced by those external distractions and internal thoughts. Instead, we bring our mind to the focal point, which is the internal object we choose to focus on. So the right approach for meditation is to keep our focus on that internal object. External and internal distractions may differ from one person to another. Even though the practice of meditation is the same in that we are all trying to keep a focussed mind, the things we are distracted by could be different for each person. So we must be able to identify our own main object of mental distraction. Then we do not allow the mind to be influenced by that object. Withdraw our mind from the object means trying not to even think about the object. We need to keep our mind focussed on the internal object that we choose to meditate on.

This approach is not limited to meditation practise, but it is also applicable to life in general. There are certain objects which, as soon as we come into contact with them, actually disturb our mind to a point where we feel depressed. As a consequence, whatever we do doesn't seem to have much meaning. And we have a heavy feeling because of the object that disturbs us. The object can disturb us when we think about it, or we come into actual physical contact with it, for example when we see the object. Either way, we have a mental image of the object which disturbs us. Whether we actually see it nakedly with our eyes and it disturbs our mind, or whether it is the mental image, a thought or memory in our mind that disturbs us, either way it brings the same unwanted consequences in that it disturbs our mind and we feel heavy and burdened.

As long as we have this heavy feeling in our mind, it obstructs us from having a fresh mind and the ability to be energetic in what we want to do. When we don't have that energetic, fresh, clear mind, then this brings about a lack of enthusiasm in life. This is something which we really need to protect ourselves from. Because we want to have a sound good meaning in our life, we want to have enthusiasm in what we do and bring about good results. It is important that we protect our mind from whatever object that may disturb us. To overcome that difficulty, we meditate by withdrawing our mind from the object of disturbance. We focus and familiarise our mind with a single object and try not to be influenced by the object of disturbance.

As mentioned previously, the object that disturbs us is not necessarily a tangible object; it could even be a negative thought in our mind. So, we must not think that the object is necessarily a solid and tangible thing that we come into contact only by seeing it. The object could also be a negative, disturbing thought in our mind. As soon as it occurs in our mind, we feel completely powerless, and completely overpowered by that negative thought. This then influences us. It is very important that we protect ourselves from this. If we allow ourselves to be under the influence of the object, whether it is the external object or whether it is an internal negative state of mind that disturbs us, whatever the object may be, as soon as it

occurs and we allow ourselves to be influenced by that, it robs us from our strength and energy because it burdens our mind.

To give analogy: if we were to walk around with a heavy load on our back we wouldn't be able to feel comfortable and relaxed wherever we go; physically it would be very tiring. We wouldn't be able to keep walking for too long because we have a very heavy burden on our back. That is something which we can all relate to, right? Similarly, a disturbance in our mind is like carrying a heavy burden in our mind which weighs us down. Anything else we do becomes cumbersome and difficult. In order to remove that weight from our mind, we must distance ourselves from that object of disturbance or distractions, and that is something that I always emphasise. It is crucial that we identify and try to overcome the object of disturbance. If the mind is burdened, even physically, we can feel heavy and burdened because of the negative states of mind that we are preoccupied with. For as long as we are in that state of mind, we would feel physically tired and low in energy. If we overcome that negative state of mind, even physically we begin to feel light. So when we make an attempt to try to overcome that disturbing state of mind, we can then start to bring about real rest and peace in our mind; and also physically we begin to feel much more energetic, healthy and good.

The main point that I am emphasising is first of all, the importance of the practice of meditation in order to protect our mind; and then secondly the actual technique, how to go about the meditation.

Having given a summary of these two essential points, it is now appropriate to take some time for actual meditation. I would like to emphasize that for those who may have any particular disturbing objects, again either external or internal objects which disturb them, either an obsession or an object that as soon as you think about it disturbs you immensely, then in any practice of meditation - particularly now - it is good to make a special effort in trying to withdraw oneself from that particular object. Make a mental decision that 'I will not allow myself to be under the influence of that disturbing object' whether it is an external object which disturbs oneself or whether it is an internal negative state of mind. Try to make a commitment to oneself that, 'From now on I will not give power or authority to this object to disturb me; I will not allow myself to be influenced'. One makes that commitment to take control of oneself.

So in the actual meditation, withdraw the mind from all these distractions. For those who have a particular object which disturbs them the most, then distance oneself and withdraw one's mind from these distractions, and keep the mind on the object to be focussed, which is our breath. Some people may not have a particular disturbing object which is bothering them right now, but if we are ordinary beings there wouldn't be anyone who won't have general delusions or general distractions in the mind. The general distractions which we all face are disturbing attitudes or delusions in our mind. Everyone has some sort of disturbing attitude to deal with. To withdraw ourselves from the delusions in our mind which serve as distractions, we need to keep our mind

focussed on the object, which in this case is the breath. Keeping our mind hundred percent on that breath and focussing on it, we engage in meditation.

(pause for meditation).

Just as we attempted now in our short session of meditation, it is good to try to maintain a regular meditation practice in our daily life. But what needs to be really emphasised here is to get the right technique, and to make sure that for whatever time one spends in meditation, even for a short time, that we make it into a really authentic practice. This is done, as mentioned previously, by making sure that we are maintaining a focus on the neutral or virtuous object that we choose to focus on, and making a special effort or commitment and effort to distance our mind from the object of our distraction. Otherwise, if we don't make a special effort to do that, we are allowing ourselves to go into a semi-focussed state of mind, and the mind remains distracted. If we allow ourselves to be in that frame of mind when we practise meditation, then what we are doing is in fact strengthening the object of our disturbance, and we are only misleading ourselves by following our distractions. There are cases where in attempting to practise meditation, rather than by distancing ourselves from objects such as desire, the attachment and desire actually increases in the mind. So one must be very careful not to allow that to happen, and make sure the practise we do is a real, authentic practice. So as mentioned previously, we need to identify the object of our distractions and make a particular effort and commitment to withdraw our mind from it.

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

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2. Reflections on the origins of suffering

From the text we come into the second category from an earlier topic which is reflections on causes of cyclic existence in terms of its origin. In relation to the topic that we have covered in our earlier session, it was to go into the details of the sufferings of cyclic existence, categorised into the five or six realms of existences. The teachings went into particular sufferings that are experienced by the various types of living beings within cyclic existence within the different realms.

As a summary of what we have covered previously, the main point for one's own personal practice is to reflect on these various types of sufferings. The main purpose is not to burden one's mind and feel even more suffering, but rather to instil a sense of disenchantment and disgust towards cyclic existence. By reflecting on the various types of sufferings of cyclic existence, the outcome on a personal level for personal practice is to induce a strong sense of determination and a wish to be free from that suffering. Also slowly instilling a genuine sense and wish to free others from the various types of sufferings as well. This is the next most essential point that one must derive from the topic studied earlier. As one develops a sense of wishing to be free from sufferings on a personal level, we

need to reflect on other beings' sufferings and wish them to be free from sufferings as well. That will help our mind to expand further, instead of just focusing on ourselves. It can actually expand one's mind to a point where we feel a definite experience of connecting with other living beings.

The teachings mention that if we focus on other beings, wishing them to be free from sufferings, one actually accumulates great extensive merits. One can definitely relate to thinking about others and wishing them to be free from suffering. This makes one feel more courageous in one's mind, and experience more satisfaction within one's mind, because it gives a sense of duty and purpose in one's life. Also another practical benefit of reflecting on the sufferings of cyclic existence: the teachings indicate that being born in cyclic existence under the influence of delusion and karma means that one has to experience the various types of sufferings in cyclic existence. For as long as one is in that condition, one has to inevitably experience the various types of sufferings. By understanding that, and reflecting how it is the nature of samsara, when one actually does experience difficulties and problems, it won't be such a shock to one's mind; it would be bearable. As the teachings mention, one develops a particular type of patience which willingly endures suffering. This means that when one experiences sufferings, one reflects on how this is the nature of being in samsara, and how it is the result of one's own previous karma. In this way, one would be able to accept the suffering; consequently it does not disturb oneself so much. Whatever sufferings one experiences, one handles them better. On a personal level, that is a great benefit because we all have to experience the various types of sufferings. So if we can actually accept it and be able deal with it more efficiently, then it will bring less disturbance and as a result we have a happier mind. So that's how it benefits us personally. When we reflect on others' suffering, and we are prompted to help them in a more practical way, then love and compassion increases. As we focus on others' sufferings and generate a wish for them to be free from suffering, then our scope expands as it encompasses others as well. This brings more joy to one's mind.

In relation to the sufferings that one experiences try to adopt the practice of patience, of willingly enduring the suffering by reflecting on the nature of the suffering of cyclic existence as being the results of one's karma. We can definitely see the practical benefit of someone who follows the techniques of the Buddha versus someone who does not practise this kind of technique. Someone who does not have any kind of spiritual practice, or who doesn't practise any form of religion, the problems they experience can bring great suffering for them, particularly in relation to physical sufferings such as illness. When an illness is experienced, we can definitely see the difference between how it is handled between someone who practises the teachings as described earlier, versus someone who does not engage in any practice. For someone who does not engage in the mind training practices, when they experience pain from the illness, then they also experience mental pain. On top of the physical pain from the illness, they also experience

mental anguish and pain. Such a person experiences two types of sufferings, physical as well as mental. Whereas for someone who practises according to the teachings in training the mind, then by practising patience they will experience lesser or no mental sufferings at all. While the physical suffering might be on the same level, they do not allow the physical pain to torment their mind. This means they are not be burdened with the mental pain and anguish. This is a great benefit.

Those who practise the Dharma have lesser worries in their mind. Whereas someone who does not practise Dharma has many more worries in their mind. If there are no worries in one's mind, then the mind is in a happy state. I can share a personal experience on the truth of this. On the escape route from Tibet, and coming to India for the first time, all through that time I was deprived of food and clothing; I didn't even have good shoes to wear. As I was escaping across the mountains, there was a danger of running out of food at any moment, while there was gunfire from behind by the communist Chinese. However, those circumstances didn't seem to affect my mind. I didn't know where I would get my next meal, or where I would get shelter and clothing, but that seemed to be the least concern in my mind. My only concern was being able to escape so I could study the Buddhist philosophy and practise the Dharma. And there were times when it occurred to me that maybe it might be even worthwhile to find a remote area along the escape route and maybe just spend my time in meditation in isolation. If I could escape to India that's fine, but if not I might be able to meditate in some remote and quiet place. So those were the only concerns in my mind. Those thoughts brought solace to my mind, and didn't allow my mind to be anxious and worried. It seems like whatever happened to me, that if I could just have a mind in a state of Dharma, a virtuous state of mind, then I was happy and content. I am not saying that I had any real profound spiritual experience as such, but that is something I can relate as an example of how a worry-free state of mind can ease anxiety under physical distress.

However from a conventional point of view, some may think that people who do not have any worries are useless or inferior. So maybe my mind was in that category. In normal worldly conventions it seems that for someone who does not have any worries there are terms such as lucky-go-free, and they are considered childish because children don't have any worries. If they have something to eat, then that's fine. Children don't worry about the next meal; they just seem to have fun time playing. Because they don't have any particular worries in their mind, they are mostly happy. So when an adult is free from worries, some may see them as being childish because they have no worries and concerns in life. But there is a great benefit if one doesn't allow the worries to obsess one's mind, even though conventionally it may be considered as silly and childish. There seems to be a great benefit; rather than loss, there is a great gain for the mind.

Children appear to be jolly and playful, and have a happy mind. As they slowly grow up into their teens, they start getting lots of influence from outside, peer pressure, and you begin to see there's a noticeable change. Some children, who seem to be quite happy and easy going and

good natured, begin to have worries and anxiety in their mind and even experience depression. This is something which definitely occurs in many cases, doesn't it? From the mundane point of view, when the child grows to become a teenager then they can't even enjoy chocolate any longer. When they were young there were no worries about becoming too fat by eating chocolate, they just enjoyed chocolate when they can. But then as they grow up they begin to become more conscious of their bodies and suddenly they stop enjoying chocolate because they think it is going to make them fat (*laughter*).

So that's why I generally advise that irrational concerns and worries are of no use. Why worry when something hasn't happened yet and maybe is not likely to happen? It is even doubtful that something is going to happen, yet to worry and feel anxious about it, and experience anxiety as a result of that; this is an unwanted and unnecessary extra burden for one's mind. I notice that for some people, because of the anxiety and worries which may have occurred or may have happened, even though it has not happened, it can still bring a lot of anxiety to their mind.

On one of my travels, two people were apparently in a near accident, but nothing happened to them. However they were so worried and anxious that their bones might have been broken or something terrible might have happened that when they spoke they were actually shivering and trembling out of fear. But actually nothing happened to them physically, so they could have relaxed and felt happy that nothing happened to them. Instead they were trembling with fear. I advised them to lie down a bit and just relax for the moment, then reasoned with them that nothing has happened to them. This shows how the level of anxiety and worry can affect oneself to a great degree, even having physical symptoms.

Some business people have confided in me that in engaging in big business deals, it is better if they don't think about the outcome, because if they start thinking about it, they will start having lots of worries in their mind and even lose sleep. They would rather just think it is OK, that they have done the deal. If they base it on a bit of faith and don't worry too much about it, then they have a much sounder sleep. Business people worry about taking out loans and having to repay interest. If they start worrying about the interest they have to pay and their capacity to repay the loan, then that brings lots of worries in their mind and they lose sleep. But if they continue to do business as usual and don't worry too much about having to repay the interest, then somehow things move along and things seem OK.

The main point I am trying to make is that having worries in our mind and allowing our mind to be obsessed and influenced by the worries, seems to bring only negative consequences for ourselves such as anxiety and, even worse, depression. So to protect our mind from worries, it is good for us to keep our mind focussed, and try to deal with situations as they happen, but not to allow the mind to become paranoid.

Don't allow the mind to be anxious about things which haven't happened and may not likely happen at all. So stop worrying about it. Otherwise we are just obsessed

and there is no end to worries then, because anything could happen at any time. So have a realistic approach and a realistic view, and try to work on whatever we have on a daily basis. Just work to keep a realistic outlook in life; that is what is important.

Worries are endless. Some people, even though they have many riches and wealth and may even be billionaires, but their mind may not really be at ease because they have so many worries. Apparently there are many accounts of wealthy people being obsessed with worries. In that case their wealth has not brought any real benefit for their mind.

The summary point is that a person free of worry is a happy person, and a person full of worry is an unhappy and sad person. From my own experience, a mind free of worries can lead to a more relaxed outlook and point of view in one's mind. As someone who was poor but because of lack of worries was a happy person, I use myself as an example. Whereas those who are really rich, but because of worry they are really unhappy - I am sure they are many examples of that.

Before we conclude for the evening, let us take a few minutes for meditation. As we withdraw our minds from all external and internal distractions, we keep our mind focussed on the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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