
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual it would be good to spend some time for meditation. It is always good to remind ourselves of the main purpose of engaging in meditation practice. Essentially, engaging in the practice of meditation is to familiarise our mind with positive attitudes and conducive states of mind. A conducive and focussed mind leads to a more positive mind, which in turn leads to a peaceful mind. This is the purpose of meditation. Furthermore, the purpose of meditation can also be summarised as familiarising ourselves with the technique of protecting mental joy and happiness. Among the different joys and happiness that we can experience, mental joy and happiness is the most essential to us. It is long lasting, thus contributing to our well-being.

For the relevance of meditation practise to become firmly established, we need to constantly remind ourselves of the importance of mental joy and happiness; confirming it to ourselves with statements such as, 'What is most important for me is mental joy and happiness'. If our mental joy and happiness were to diminish, this leads us into becoming vulnerable to problems. For as long as we can maintain mental joy and happiness, then that contributes to our well-being. In investigating our needs, first of all we cannot deny that there is a self, we do exist. Our own well-being is important, and we need to take responsibility of ourselves. As we are solely responsible for our own well-being, we must look into what is most essential for it, which is mental joy and happiness. Thus whatever mental joy and happiness is cultivated must be protected and not allowed to decline or diminish. This is what meditation is all about.

When we reflect and analyse, and look into what we want and need for our own well-being, then we come to the conclusion that we need mental joy and happiness. We all want to be joyful and happy. No one can deny that fact. The reason that I specify mental joy and happiness is because there is also physical joy and happiness. We can categorise joy and happiness into that which is physical and that which is mental. Between these two, the primary one is mental joy and happiness. Our existence is related to our mental state. Our physical state is not so durable, whereas our mental state is much more durable and is also an essential part of ourselves.

Having investigated this ourselves, we come to understand that it's obvious that between the two, physical and mental, it's mental joy and happiness that is the most important. That being the case, when we look into the ways and means of gaining physical and mental happiness for ourselves, it is actually easier to achieve mental joy and happiness. This is because it is more

within our reach. As we say in Tibetan, 'Within our own hand', which means things are much more manageable when we can do them ourselves without having to rely too much on external resources. Physical happiness on the other hand depends on many external factors such as material gain for physical comfort. We have to depend on external factors to gain material wealth. Whereas, we don't need to rely entirely on external factors to gain mental joy; it is something which is developed within our own mind. Thus it would seem that mental happiness is much more manageable, and much easier to obtain.

Mental joy and happiness is something that is gained and cultivated within ourselves through practising meditation, which is something we have to do ourselves. Finding the time and a conducive environment to practise meditation is the cause to gain mental joy and happiness. It is easy, because it is something that we do not have to rely or depend upon others, we make the decision to do it ourselves. The resources are within us. Whereas we all know that we have to put in so much time and energy for the material gains that contribute to our physical happiness. For example we have to go out to work, and it is so difficult to find work and when we do find work, and then there is so much anxiety to keep that job. Within one day we have to spend so much time and energy in acquiring the material gains that contribute primarily to our physical happiness. We can see how much time and energy we spend in acquiring our material needs, and even then it is not certain that we will actually benefit or achieve real happiness from that. Having so much material wealth doesn't guarantee real happiness.

The practice of meditation is the main cause for us to gain mental joy and happiness, so we must understand that meditation is not merely sitting in a comfortable, relaxed posture. Meditation is really about having the right mental state. Through our own experiences of meditation, we notice that even if our body is relaxed and we are physically in a conducive environment, such as a quiet room, if the mind is still distracted then a physically conducive environment won't help our meditation. It is as if the mind has become separated, even though, of course, the mind and body are not completely separate. It is as if the mind is somewhere else when the body is in a physically conducive state. When we don't pay attention to our mental state, we are not really properly training our mind. If the mind is not in a relaxed conducive state, even if the body is relaxed, then this does not contribute to real joy and happiness in our mind. But even though the body is seemingly relaxed, because the mind is constantly busy and wandering off being distracted with all our thoughts, ideas, plans and worries, we experience a heavy burdened feeling rather than joy and happiness and bliss in our mind. This burden is the mind being preoccupied with all the distractions, which lead to worry and confusion. So in meditation practice, the initial attempt is to distance our mind from all distractions and try to mould the mind into a conducive state so it can achieve a firm, stable and focussed state.

A distracted mind leads to confusion and the mind feeling heavy and burdened, which can lead to a depressive and unhappy state of mind. We practise meditation by withdrawing our mind from distractions

and temporarily placing our mind on an internal object to focus on. This soothes our mind. It is as if a heavy weight has been lifted from our mind, because the mind feels naturally relaxed. This way of meditating, the technique of distancing or separating our mind from distractions, has an immediate natural consequence of the mind feeling relaxed.

What has been explained so far is something that you all will accept as being reasonable. It is something that is logical and reasonable. For those who have already tried and are about to try meditating now, it is something we can all manage. It is not something that is beyond our capacity, or way beyond our reach. The reason our mind has the capacity is because of the quality of the mind. A characteristic of the mind is that it can transform into becoming more pure. If what has been explained seems reasonable and manageable that is in fact the case. It is a matter of deciding and then actually engaging in the meditation practice. The practical way of gaining benefit from meditation is to actually engage in the practise and then slowly and continuously keep up with it.

Importantly, with a gradual process we will slowly improve. That is the nature of our mind, it can improve, which means that the mind can be transformed from a distracted state into a more calm and peaceful state. The process of experiencing a calm mind is a gradual process. If we do this in our daily practise, then we can definitely achieve the results. We should not feel discouraged by thinking that we cannot practise. We shouldn't procrastinate, or feel low self-esteem. Instead, we should boost our self-esteem by thinking, 'Yes, I can manage. I can do the practice. It is a matter of just doing it'.

Here we have a conducive environment to meditate. When we engage in the practice, first of all we sit in a proper meditative posture, that is, a posture conducive to meditation. When we practise meditation we need to distance our mind from all distractions and maintain our focus on the chosen object. As usual we will use our own breath, the natural inhalation and exhalation of our breath. However, the particular manner as described in the teaching is to try to focus on the natural rhythm of our breath where we are not breathing in too shallow or too deep. We focus on the natural rhythm of our breath; we don't take very deep breaths where we are making obvious sounds, but rather we breathe quietly preferably through our nostrils. It is a gentle and natural manner of breathing. What we are focusing on is the natural inhalation and exhalation of our breath. As we breathe in and out naturally, try to maintain focus on the breath during the entire meditation. (*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

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2. Reflection on the causes of suffering – the faults of cyclic existence

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.1. How afflictions or delusions arise

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.1.2. Identifying the afflictions

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.1.2.1. In identifying the afflictions

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.1.2.1.1 Desirous attachment

The main heading in the text is contemplating on how we enter into cyclic existence through the origin of suffering. Under that heading we identify how afflictions or delusions arise. This is subdivided into two, which explains how within karma and delusions, the delusions primary. The second category, which is identifying or explaining the afflictions themselves, is subdivided into three: identifying the delusions and afflictions; the order in which they are arise; and the faults of afflictions and delusions.

Afflictions or delusions are the primary cause for all our sufferings, and are the cause that leads us into the cyclic existence of pain and misery. What we need to do in order to be free from that existence of misery and suffering is to overcome or abandon the main cause of that suffering, which are our delusions or afflictions. In order to abandon our afflictions we must first identify what they are. Without identifying our afflictions, we won't be able to overcome them. The afflictions presented in the text include anger, attachment, and pride. After identifying the states of mind that disturb us, then we can proceed to the method and techniques of overcoming and abandoning them.

All afflictions have something common in nature. There's one word to identify all the disturbing thoughts and the disturbing states of mind within us - afflictions. What are the afflictions (also known as delusions) that we need to identify within us? The moment a delusion arises in our mind, it disturbs our mind, and puts it in a state of unrest. This is identified as a delusion. When we look into negative states of mind such as anger, or attachment, we notice that when anger arises, the moment it arises, it disturbs the mind and makes it in an unrestful state. It is also the same with attachment. Whenever we experience a disturbed state of mind, this indicates that a delusion has arisen in the mind. There is a state of delusion within our mind that is bringing about that unrest and disturbance in the mind. The absence of delusions is a restful mind. When delusions are not present in our mind, the natural state of mind is a tranquil and settled one. That is the actual nature of the mind. All delusions are secondary states of mind.

There are many specific kinds of delusions which disturb our mind, about which the text will go into further detail. When the text identifies specific delusions, it categorises them into the six root delusions, then a further category of the ten delusions; five which are views and five which are non views. The first of the five which are non-views is identified as attachment. The text explains that attachment means noticing a pleasant external or internal object and desiring it. These pleasant external and internal objects are called contaminated objects. By seeing an contaminated attractive object, the mind desires that object and wants to possess it. This is attachment.

Attachment is identified in the Buddhist teaching as being a mistaken or wrong conception. Noticing a pleasant or an attractive internal or external object in itself is not a fault, because there are objects which are attractive and have natural beauty and good characteristics. The fault lies in the exaggerated perception of the object of being attractive, beyond the

actual reality of the object—beyond whatever attributes or attractiveness the object may have; going beyond that and seeing it as being much more attractive. Thus attachment is an exaggerated view of seeing the object as being attractive or beautiful beyond its actual reality.

When we relate this to our own experience it might make more sense. When we have a strong attachment to someone, don't they appear as being entirely attractive and beautiful? In every aspect they seem to have the best qualities, we might not even see any faults at all. That is when attachment is in an excessively strong state within us. Now when attachment reduces after time, then how does the person, who we initially thought was incredibly attractive and beautiful, appear to us now? Do they appear with the same qualities and attributes that we saw earlier? Do they seem entirely good and beautiful in every aspect? No! We notice that we begin to see some faults. That is because the strong attachment to the object has reduced. The level of exaggeration is reduced a bit, even though there still is some exaggeration there. The exaggeration increases when attachment is stronger. When attachment decreases to a certain point, we begin to see the faults of the person. Then instead of seeing them as being attractive, we may start to see the object as being unattractive, and that might even cause anger to arise in our mind. Instead of attachment, anger might arise to the same object that we thought was entirely beautiful earlier.

Attachment is a state of mind where we desire an object by seeing the attractiveness of the object, thus desiring to possess it. Is there anything wrong in desiring the object? Desiring the object itself should not be seen as a fault. Rather, the fault lies in the state of mind with which we desire the object, and how we relate to the object. The state of mind of attachment, which is a faulty state of mind, comes along with desire. When we exaggerate the qualities of the object and desire, something which in fact is not entirely there, then that is where the fault arises. This is where we experience the suffering of disappointment. The fault does not lie so much in the desiring of it, but in what we desire, which is the non-existent qualities and attributes that we mentally place upon the object. So when we desire such an object, then we experience the consequences of disappointment and suffering.

We cannot use the word 'desire' synonymously with 'love' in the true sense. We might use the word love when in fact we are experiencing desire for an object. From the technical Buddhist explanation of what love is, we realise that love and desire are completely separate mental states. When we have a strong attachment to someone, we use the words 'I love this person'. However, in analysing how love is described in the Buddhist teaching and comparing the mental state of desire, we realise that they are not the same. They are actually completely separate states of mind. Thus we need to understand what it is we call love. When love arises, what kind of mental state is that? As described in the teachings, love is having a wish to benefit others. Thus when we compare the two 'love' and 'attachment', we can see that they are separate mental states.

Love and compassion is a mental state, such that if we met a person who is in a destitute state, suffering, and experiencing obvious difficulties, we feel a very strong and spontaneous wish to take upon the responsibility of bringing them joy and removing them from suffering. It is that mental state, where we actually feel a spontaneous strong wish of wishing to remove their suffering and bringing them to a happy state, particularly in relation to a destitute person who is suffering immensely. That is what we call love and compassion in Buddhism. Thus we can see that love and compassion are definitely different from desire or attachment.

When we analyse how the mental state of love and compassion arises within an individual in relation to the object, the very fact that the object is in a destitute state of suffering becomes the reason for the mental state of love and compassion to arise. Thus love and compassion arises in relation to the interest for the other person rather than a self interest. Whereas desire arises with a self interest, something to be gained for ourselves.

We can relate to our own experience of how we experience these different states of mind. This is not the case for everyone, but for most ordinary beings when we talk about loving someone it is most likely that a strong desire is mixed with that love. There is a basis of love and compassion there, however it is mostly mixed with desire and attachment as well. To distinguish between desire and actual love and compassion as different mental states, let us take a particular example of someone who we really love, whether it is a partner or someone that we live with. It could also be our family members or our parents, in either case someone who we feel very close to. We can then differentiate the different mental states according to different circumstances.

Generally when you feel attraction towards your partner, that state of mind is most likely called desire. It is not that there isn't any love and compassion on that basis as well, but more predominantly it would be a state of mind of desire. Whereas if your loved one is in circumstances where they are not well, such as suffering from an illness or experiencing difficulty of grief, then the concern that you have for that person would be more predominantly love and compassion. When they are actually in a destitute state, this is when we actually really love them. Love is described as a mental state where we wish the other to be happy, and compassion is the particular state of mind where we wish them to be free from any sort suffering, such as the suffering of being sick. So that very strong concern we have of wanting them to be free from illness, to recover and be joyful and happy again shows that there is a love and compassion that we have towards them as well which at that time is more predominant. Similarly when we see our parents in a sick state, then that very spontaneous, strong wish we have of wanting to help them become better so that they are free from suffering and illness is what we call compassion towards them. Likewise wanting one's father and mother to be joyful and happy is described as feeling love. So in this way, we can distinguish between the different states. If we investigate within ourselves, we notice that the state of mind that we have towards the person is not exactly the same when we relate to them with a desirous feeling.

Even though it may seem subtle, we will notice the different circumstances and different times and our responses to that.

Love and compassion are most essential and crucial to sustain a real true relationship with others, particularly those who you claim that you love. In expressing love towards someone, if that love is based on mere desire and attachment and lacks a true quality of love and compassion, then that alone would not sustain the relationship. In fact it will lead to destruction of the relationship, particularly at times of hardship and difficulty.

If love for someone else is based merely on attraction and desire, then when destitute situations arise, when they are ill and sick, they would not seem as attractive as they did earlier. Someone who is obviously sick and ill will not be as appealing or attractive. So if love towards them is based merely on attachment and desire, then because they are not attractive any more, our desire towards them - what we call 'love' in the worldly sense - will also cease. For common human relationships to be based entirely on love and compassion, is something which may seem quite impossible initially, as there is an element of desire which is there. However, we should still definitely start to work on developing love and compassion towards the other as well. As love and compassion is developed further, then this is what will sustain the relationship, and it is also appreciated by the other person. So we should look for some elements of real love and compassion in the relationship, as this is what will survive. Love and compassion will help us, particularly in times of difficulties. When there is suffering and misery that is when love and compassion take an active role of helping to eliminate suffering for the other person and bring them joy. So we can really see the value of love and compassion in a relationship, and how essential it is for the relationship to survive. If we want to experience a good harmonious relationship with others, then the element of love and compassion is essential.

In relation to ourselves, we can see the value of love and compassion when we are not well, or when we are destitute; what kind of person would help us then? Would it be a person who is merely attracted to us? Or someone who has an element of love and compassion? The way we find out is in times of difficulties. If someone extends their help and concern towards us, then that is who we will consider as a true partner, or a true friend because in times of real difficulties or destitute times, they did not fail us, and they continue to help us.

I give the following advice, particularly to youngsters as a joke. But with all seriousness I tell them, 'When seeking a partner, especially a life partner, then you must be careful not to choose your partner merely based on looks. If you were to choose your partner based only on looks then you may become really disappointed later. So what you should look for instead is the inner qualities that the person has, as well as whether both your mental constitutions match or not. Does both your mental outlook of life and so forth in general match or not? Do your main concerns in life and their concerns in life match? If they are compatible, then you could base your

decisions about whether you could spend your life with them on that. Otherwise if you were to choose only based on their external looks and attractiveness, then the relationship will not be sustainable; you will not be able to choose the right partner for your life.' I further tease them by likening some relationships to food. When people are really hungry they will eat anything that comes along, even if it is disagreeable to their stomach. Because they are really hungry, they may eat whatever they get. Similarly, we shouldn't have a relationship with the first person that comes along just because we are hungry for a relationship. Then I further explain that of the two, external beauty and internal beauty, it is internal beauty that is far more important. When I explain it in that way to youngsters they often ask back 'Is that really true?'

Desire is a wrong conception or a faulty state of mind. The more you express desire, the stronger it becomes and it becomes difficult to remove yourself from the object of desire. The analogy that is given in the text is that desire is similar to a drop of oil on a piece of cloth. We know that if we have an oily stain on a cloth it is very difficult to remove that, and it actually starts to permeate through the cloth. One small drop will of oil permeates the cloth and it becomes difficult to remove that oily stain.

On the surface or superficial level, desire does seem to serve the purpose of bringing people together, whether it's family, or partners. However, if desire is all that brings people together, and it lacks the element of love and compassion, then it will lead to more problems in a relationship. People coming together based merely on desire will lead to further complications and problems in the relationship, as many of you might have experienced.

Before we conclude the session for the evening let us spend a few minutes in contemplation. As we sit in an appropriate meditation posture, we can focus on the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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