
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual it would be appropriate to spend some time in meditation. When we formally engage in meditation practice, it is good to sit in an upright and relaxed position, which also allows the mind to be comfortable. So it is important that we assume a comfortable, relaxed sitting position.

It is also important to make sure that the mind feels joyful – one should do the practice in a fresh and joyful state of mind. The meditation we are doing now is the one where, having chosen one object, we keep the mind centred or focused on that object, and for as long as possible, maintain that focus on the object. The objective of this type of meditation is to generate a mind that is single-pointedly focused on the object – a single-pointed mind that is one-hundred-percent focused on the meditation object.

To obtain that focus, the technique we use is to withdraw one's mind from the external distractions with which it is normally preoccupied. That is done by making the determination to control the mind, intentionally withdrawing it from worldly thoughts. We then set our mind's focus on the object and nothing but the meditation object. In that way, the mind will naturally settle down. That process of withdrawing one's mind from the external distractions, keeping its attention on the chosen object and maintaining that focus on the object is the process of meditation.

The point we need to emphasise in meditation is that one should really try to have a one-hundred-percent focus on the chosen object. Here we use our breath as the meditation object. That means making sure we first withdraw our mind from external thoughts and distractions.

We need to make that strong determination and discipline ourselves to engage in withdrawing our mind, because it is not as if the mind will naturally become withdrawn and focus on the breath; rather, it requires some effort. That is because our mind is not used to being focused on one object but is used to being distracted by many objects. If we don't make the effort and don't make sure we withdraw our mind and just let our mind be – being half-hearted in our practice and not paying attention to our state of mind – we may think that we are focusing on our breath, but meanwhile one part of our mind is constantly following thoughts, ideas and other distractions that keep on going. We need to use our complete attention and diligence in this process. Even though it is for a short time, within that short time we have to make sure that our mind is one-hundred-percent focused on the breath.

Of course initially it will be a bit difficult, but that is part of the training – to withdraw the mind from distractions. The reason why it is difficult is that our mind is familiar with the habit of going from one thought to another and being completely distracted. Thus it requires effort to reverse that situation. The practice only becomes the true practice of meditation when we can reverse that situation whenever we are completely distracted.

So using the breath as the object to focus on, we bring our mind inward and focus on the natural inflow and outflow of our breath and try to maintain the focus for the next few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*).

In relation to one's daily meditation practice, it is very important to make sure that we are using the correct technique. That is a very important point that I have stressed many times before, and that I stress again and again. During our practice of meditation we must make sure that we are withdrawing the mind from the objects of distraction, especially those distractions that are most prevalent in one's daily life. Whatever distractions are most prevalent in one's mind, we must make the attempt to withdraw our mind from that disturbing object, which only brings us problems.

If we do not make the attempt to withdraw our mind from that particularly disturbing object, it is unlikely that we will have a focused mind when we attempt to meditate. Even if our mind did seem focused during our meditation, if we did not make the attempt to withdraw our mind from that particular disturbing distraction, when we come out of our meditation, we might notice that our mind again has a heavy sinking feeling. Immediately it goes back to the object of distraction that we were preoccupied with earlier. If we find that we are again immediately preoccupied with that object, this shows that in our normal practice of meditation, we have not made the attempt to withdraw our mind from that object. Because we are habituated to focusing on that object, even during our so-called practice of meditation, then when we come out of meditation we find that our mind immediately goes towards that object. That shows our technique has not been correct; we have not been meditating in the right way. Thus we might come to feel discouraged and draw the wrong conclusion that the practice of meditation does not work. In fact, the reality is that we have not made the attempt to engage in the proper technique of meditation.

The positive result we need to obtain from our practice of meditation is a subdued mind. That is the whole purpose of our practice of meditation. To that effect, the Buddha has mentioned that a subdued mind is a happy mind. As we are all striving to achieve a happy state of mind, then the means to that end is having a subdued mind. A subdued mind means a mind that is not preoccupied or which does not give its full attention to distractions.

Now of course it would be a tall order to think that we could withdraw our mind completely from all disturbing emotions immediately. There are many types and levels of delusions or afflictions in the mind, from the gross to the very subtle. However what we identify in our normal life as being a problem only becomes a problem for as long as we feed that problem with our attention. It is like

adding fuel to a fire. As long as we allow our mind to be preoccupied with problems and difficulties, to that extent our mind will be tormented by those problems. We escalate that disturbance in our mind by feeding it with our attention. Thus in our daily meditation practice, it may be difficult to deal with the subtle afflictions and delusions immediately. We need to attempt to first try to overcome our major problems to have a calmer, more peaceful life. To that extent we can attempt to achieve a relatively subdued mind through our practice of meditation using the correct technique.

When we reflect on the purpose of meditation practice, we can relate it to the general purpose of our life, which basically comes down to achieving a happy, peaceful mind. That is what we are striving to achieve through whatever we do – to gain some happiness, physically and mentally. So we can basically summarise the whole purpose of our existence is to try to be happy. Whether we are conscious of it or not and whether we can achieve it or not, the things that we do, even the worldly things – eating, sleeping, walking, working, playing, or whatever activity we engage in – are done with the intention to make ourselves happy. So we need to investigate our own experience to see whether the activities we engage in through our pursuit of happiness bring us happiness or not.

If we have found through our experience that completely indulging in worldly things does not bring about happiness, then we come to a point of seeking other means, which comes back to the purpose of meditation. Now we have found the means for achieving happiness – the technique of practising meditation – which can definitely bring that about, but only if we use the proper technique and do it diligently and sincerely. Doing it sincerely means withdrawing our mind from immediate disturbances. As mentioned before, we escalate the problems in our life by feeding them with our attention, by focusing on them. It is as if we are going after a problem by constantly thinking about it, exaggerating the situation, constantly directing our attention to it. The more we place our focus and attention on our problems, the more we escalate them.

If we don't use the proper technique in our practice of meditation – if one part of our mind remains focused and concerned with that problem – it is as if we are again escalating that situation in a subtle way, deluding ourselves into thinking that we are doing our practice and solving the problem, when we are actually further escalating it. Thus it is important that when we actually use a technique that can work, we must make sure that we use it properly so that we can benefit. Why? Again it comes back to our desire for happiness; because we want happiness, it is in our best interest to do our meditation practice properly. That is why I emphasise this point.

As mentioned previously, there are different types and degrees of delusions in our mind. It is difficult to tackle them all immediately, but we can all relate to coarse levels of delusions, such as strong desire or anger, as being disturbing states of mind. As mentioned previously, desire might be hard to recognise immediately as a disturbance, but as soon as strong anger

arises in our mind, we can definitely identify it as being disturbing. We don't feel comfortable, peaceful or restful.

The moment intense anger arises in our mind, we feel agitated: the very term agitated means the mind is disturbed, not settled. Thus we are not happy in that state of mind and we lose our happiness. When we are generating strong anger in our mind, there is a point at which it becomes clear to us that we are not peaceful. That negative emotion or affliction that we have identified as anger is what has robbed us of our peace of mind. Instead of our mind being peaceful, that strong emotion prevails and thus robs the mind of peace and tranquillity. Thus we can all identify anger as a disturbing emotion, an emotion that robs us of our peace of mind.

To avert such a situation, we can begin to familiarise our mind with patience, practising patience. If we look at an object that normally disturbs us, as soon as we think about it, it starts to make us angry. Rather than feeling anger, try to practise a little bit of patience with that object. As described in the teaching, if we use that technique of developing patience in our mind, although we might not immediately be able to completely overcome the situation of being angry, we would begin to notice that it would slowly bring a transformation in the mind, and begin to change our attitude. We would begin to feel a little calmer and more relaxed, even when we came into contact with that same object.

As I mentioned previously, it may be hard to see the immediate result of meditation, but with time there will be a definite transformation. I have witnessed people going through such a transformation over a period of years, people who have personally confided in me and said that the practice of meditation has definitely helped them. Previously they had been very short-tempered, with the slightest thing making them agitated and easily angered. Yet even though they had had a short-tempered personality earlier, after some years of sincerely trying to practise, they came to tell me that they had found themselves to be more relaxed, more settled through the practice of cultivating patience. I noticed myself that this genuine transformation had taken place, that where earlier they could get easily agitated, later on they were much calmer, much more peaceful in their daily life. When that sort of transformation takes place over a period of years, it is a steady, genuine transformation that can only become better with practice.

Thus we can witness around us such transformations taking place, people becoming calmer, more positive and more settled. This is what we need to use as a means of gauging the effectiveness of meditation. The teachings mention the great benefits we would gain in future lifetimes. However that is way beyond our capacity to understand right now; we might get easily discouraged if we cannot relate to such an explanation. It is much more practical for us to relate to contemporary examples that we can see happening around us and use those examples as means to encourage ourselves to engage in the practice. Then one would experience the results in this very lifetime in our daily lives.

The main point I am making here is finding the right technique for our meditation practice. One must really analyse what is it that makes the practice of meditation effective. Is it merely the sitting posture? If one's practise of meditation is not going well, is it because one's sitting posture is not right? Does it just boil down to that? Or is it something beyond that? Is it maybe not having the right mental attitude? Not using the proper mental technique in one's practice of meditation? In that way, through our analysis, we can slowly find out for ourselves where we might be going wrong if the practice is not very effective. As we investigate further and find out the proper techniques and apply these techniques in our practices, we will definitely see the effectiveness of our meditation practice.

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

Now referring to the text, we have come to the topic that explains the different types of delusions, which are summarised as ten particular delusions or afflictions; these are then subdivided into five that are non-views and five that are views, mental states or perceptions. Of the five that are non-views, the first is attachment.

Last week, we explained how attachment and love are different states of mind. Love and attachment are quite different in their focus and the way they are generated. The actual emotion that we experience is different in each case. So it is important for us to differentiate between love and attachment. We also explained how, if we don't apply the antidotes to attachment, then by the very nature of attachment, the more you express it, the stronger it becomes. The more you express desire, naturally the stronger it becomes in one's mind and thus becomes harder to overcome. The analogy given to illustrate this is, just as a drop of oil can permeate clothing, if we don't try to remove that oil stain right away and just leave it, it will permeate through the cloth and become very difficult later on to remove. Likewise if we express attachment or desire and continuously indulge in that experience, it just increases in strength.

Thus, we should commit ourselves to overcoming desire. But to attempt to overcome all desires is initially quite impossible. This is because the delusion by its very nature is prevalent in our mind, quite deep-rooted in our psyche. Thus to completely uproot desire and other delusions is very difficult. The main point here is that we can try to not allow ourselves to be under the complete influence of delusions such as desire.

Now we come to the point of asking, how is desire harmful to us? The delusions are often referred to using the analogy of an enemy. Now, it is quite unlikely that we

could vanquish and overcome all our enemies. In other words, we may have many enemies – people who might potentially harm us – around us and we may not be able to overcome all of these people, but what we can do is find a means of protecting ourselves so that we are not under the control of those who wish to harm us. That is as much as we can do to protect ourselves. We can say it is like a self-defence mechanism to make sure that one is not harmed.

The internal enemy of the analogy is the delusions within us. So desire is an enemy because it can harm us. Now we come back to the earlier point of how does it harm us? Its harm is not something immediately obvious to us. We are normally influenced to think that if we get the object of desire it will make us happy. We are so used to believing this that we naturally tend to expect that result. We expect to feel real joy and happiness if we obtain the object of desire and if we express our desire. We think that the more desire we have, the more objects of contentment or happiness we get, the happier we will be. But one needs to analyse that; I must say that I constantly analyse how desire actually harms us. At face value, it might be hard to recognise, but when we really look into how desire harms us – and I notice this when I investigate it – people have a lot of the problems in their lives from expressing their desire.

If there is a relationship that is going quite well initially, because of desire by one of the partners for something else, this will harm the relationship. Because the relationship is being harmed out of desire for something else, the desire itself becomes the attitude or mental state that brings friction or conflict within the relationship. When we look into what brings problems to a relationship, it is because of desire for another object. This causes conflict and disturbance or fights and so forth within a relationship. So that will destroy a relationship that otherwise could have continued quite nicely. When we look further into having excessive desire, if our relationship with someone is based only on desire, the suffering of disappointment will inevitably arise because of our attachment to the object when separation takes place for whatever reason. When there is separation, one has great suffering in one's mind because of that separation. And it is because of the strong attachment we have towards the other that we experience that suffering of separation.

Then there are times when we experience the suffering of not obtaining what we want. We desire something and work so hard to try obtain it, but if we don't obtain it, again there is disappointment and suffering. But then there is the suffering of not being content when we do obtain the object! When we do get the object, we are never really content, never really happy with it, so that again is a suffering.

So when we look into the situation, we can see that many types of suffering and problems arise because of that one negative attitude – desire. I cannot stress this strongly enough to those of you who think that desire will make you happier – please don't think that way! (*laughter*) Desire does not bring more happiness. The more you express desire, the more you harbour desire or

attachment in your mind, the more suffering it will lead to. Many people feel that without desire they may not be happy, their lives will be empty. But that the opposite is true: as explained in the teachings, the less desire and attachment we have, the more happiness can be induced in our mind. That is something that I must emphasise and stress.

If we sincerely take the time to look into the disadvantages of desire and really analyse with scrutiny, we will notice how desire harms us. If one feels desire for a partner in another relationship and starts to express one's desire and influences that person to have a relationship with oneself, that action would cause the other partner to have much suffering. Some of you may feel that it may be inappropriate for me to mention this, as you may feel rightly that I have not experienced that situation – many people have said to me that the suffering they experienced in separation is so intense that it is hard to even imagine it if you have not experienced it yourself.

Again for those who have experienced that sort of separation from a loved one, you should be able to judge from your own experience. If you are very attracted to someone, when separation does occur, apparently much pain and hurt is experienced. As I said, maybe I am not the right person to talk about as I have not experienced that, but judging from others' expressions when they have related this to me, it is an experience of great pain and hurt. So if one has experienced that hurt and pain oneself, then one should try to avoid causing others such pain and hurt.

If one meddles with someone else's relationship and interferes with the desire they feel towards their partner, that interference occurs because of desire in one's mind. Thus if one starts to have an attraction to someone already engaged in a relationship and they seem to have quite a good relationship, then as soon as one experiences this attraction, one must be able to identify this as desire and see it as a potential harm to someone else. If one does not wish harm for oneself, why would one want to express that attraction and desire if it is going to potentially harm another's relationship?

This is where there is a big difference between love, compassion and desire. If one had love and compassion, one would not express one's attraction to someone if they were already in a committed relationship with someone else. One would not do that knowing that it would harm them. Love and compassion has no element in it to harm others. Whereas with desire, one becomes careless because one is acting from a purely selfish mind; for one's own gain, one may indulge and disregard others' pain and hurt.

To that effect, I quote from the Buddha's teaching where it says that anyone who intentionally harms others, is not practising the dharma. Someone may claim that they are spiritual, or that they are practising meditation, but if they are in any way intentionally hurting others, in reality they are not practising dharma. They are not following a spiritual path – that is what the Buddha has said. The intention to harm others while knowing that one is causing harm is contrary to the practice of dharma.

We need to remind ourselves of this, particularly those people who claim to be practising the dharma and meditation. If someone claims to practise the dharma or meditation when they are engaging in activities that harm others, that is when we should ask why? They say they are spiritual, they are practising dharma, but why are they harming others? That is when people begin to see others as hypocrites, as contradicting their actions.

I would have spent some time today on talking about the meditation practice that is the antidote to attachment, but haven't had time to do that. Nevertheless the main point as explained in the teaching is to train one's mind to meditate on the faults or repulsiveness of the object of desire. Because the object appears attractive to one, one feels the desire because one exaggerates the qualities one sees in the object. The opposite of that is seeing the repulsiveness or faults of the object. This will reduce desire for that object. That can be explained in more detail in the next session. Does anyone have a question, just raise your hand?

Student: How to place the teeth when meditating?

Answer: The instructions for how to place one's teeth and lips are to leave them in a natural state, which means not clenching the teeth tightly and neither closing the mouth fully nor opening it wide. One's jaw is not too loose so neither is it clenched; rather it is in a natural position where it feels comfortable and natural. If we have the mouth completely open, too much air dries up one's mouth, and if we have it too clenched, it will prevent some ventilation, which is also harmful.

Student: You mentioned that delusions may arise again after coming out of meditation? That is exactly what happens, so do I suppress it after it comes back after the meditation? How can I deal with that problem?

Answer: Now that may of course come from having a bit too high an expectation of oneself! As mentioned previously, one should not have unrealistic goals for oneself in regard to not having any delusions at all right after the meditation. The realistic approach is to see one's progress gradually – over time, one will begin to notice that there will be some change.

The reason why this problem occurs is as mentioned previously – the familiarity we have with the delusions is very strong from previous habituation over a long, long time. So that delusion arises either because you are either reminded of the object or come into contact with the object itself, which causes the delusions to arise in the mind. In either case, it is because of the familiarity one has with those objects that cause the delusion to arise.

With the practice of meditation, the main techniques mentioned many times in the past are mindfulness and introspection. Mindfulness is the state of mind that holds one's focus on the object, being aware of the object of one's meditation, whereas introspection can be related to analytical wisdom, or we can use a common term like intelligence, which is able to discriminate between the advantages and the disadvantages of the object of our distractions.

In meditation, because we have allocated a certain amount of time for single-pointed concentration, it is

easier for us during that time to withdraw our mind and try to focus on the object of meditation. In our normal life, when we come out of the meditation, because we interact with so many other things, it is difficult to naturally maintain the integrity of a focused mind. Nevertheless through our practice, we can try to slowly build up a post-meditation awareness state, trying to cultivate an awareness, so that we have that mindful awareness even after we come out of meditation. Along with that, we can use the analytical wisdom or intelligence that discerns what is positive or negative. If we have this in the background of our mind, whatever activities we engage in, this will help us maintain our general focus in life and not to be too swayed by the delusions. Even when the delusions arise, they will not completely overpower us. We will then be able to protect ourselves from succumbing completely to the delusions.

I have had someone confide in me that while they had practised meditation for a very long time, over ten years, they had not heard of this particular instruction of trying to maintain mindfulness and introspection after meditation. They said that the instruction they received was to have mindfulness and introspection during meditation: that was always emphasised and they had the notion that it was only during the practice of meditation that one needs mindfulness and introspection, but that out of meditation it may not be so necessary. So when I shared what I have shared with you earlier with someone who had practised for about ten years, he said it was the first time he had heard that instruction and it helped him immensely to try to deal with life outside the formal practice of meditation.

So what we are actually doing in formal meditation is trying to generate the tools to guide us in our normal life. If we make a distinction between the meditation session and outside the meditation session as though they were two opposing things, it would not be beneficial for us. Rather when we practise mindfulness and introspection in meditation, it is so we can use them in our daily life, to lead us along a good path in our life. That means that in our life we should have a general mindfulness or awareness about what we need to be focus on in general, what is it we need to discard and the positive things we need to adopt. Then introspection and analytical wisdom can help us follow a good path in life.

Student: You said that desire can impede our happiness: how can you stay motivated with desire?

Answer: In one of our previous session, a similar discussion came up and this clearly shows that one is not able yet to make a distinction between the deluded attachment we are referring to here, which is the cause of suffering, and general desire, which is a longing to achieve something good. A desire for good is not a bad thing. The desire for achieving something worthwhile and good is something that can motivate us, something we can maintain.

But the attachment referred to here is a delusion because it causes suffering. To illustrate this further, in our normal life as far as being a human being with a contaminated body, for our survival we need to consume food, drink and so forth. The desire to have food in order

to sustain oneself would not be considered a harmful desire.

On the other hand, there may be situation where we desire something beyond our basic needs, merely out of indulgence. Maybe our desire for something is so strong that we try to obtain that even at the expense of causing harm to others. That is clearly an example of a desire or attachment that is completely harmful.

Then there are situations where one desires others to be happy, for example, even if it causes one a little bit of inconvenience – as long as it makes them happy, one thinks that is OK. Some people have the attitude that although it may be a little bit inconvenient for them, that's fine, as long as it makes the other person happy that's fine by them. In that sense, having the desire for others to be happy is a positive desire. It is a desire that we can allow ourselves to be motivated with.

Before we conclude this session for the evening let us again spend a few minutes in a focused meditation. This time we focus on the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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