
The Condensed Lam Rim

ལྷན་སྐྱེས་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བཞུགས་སྒྲོལ།

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As usual it would be good to spend some time in meditation. For that purpose we find a comfortable, relaxed position. As we sit in an upright, but comfortable position, it is also important to have a fresh and clear mind in order to engage in the practice of meditation. We understand that there is great significance and benefit in having a relaxed body. There is also a benefit in having a relaxed mind. Even in a worldly sense we can all agree that it is not sufficient to just have a relaxed body. One also has to have a relaxed mind. That's something that we would all see as a good attribute.

The simple advice that is usually given for meditation is, 'Just relax your body and mind'. I, on the other hand adopt a position where I do a lot of explanation on meditation, but there are those who just emphasise that point, 'Relax your body, relax your mind'. [*laughter*]. Actually it is quite attractive to hear that advice, which we can relate to immediately; especially when we are in a stressed situation we like to hear that. The words themselves are very soothing, and it is very agreeable advice.

Nevertheless, though the real purpose for the practice of meditation is no doubt to gain a uniquely and genuinely relaxed, peaceful mind, if the proper technique of how to relax the mind is not presented, it can be quite ambiguous. We all notice that the mind is not something that can naturally just relax. Even if we try to relax and try not to think about anything for a while, through habituation we immediately start thinking about something that might disturb us. That is because if there is no object to focus on the mind is not able to relax for too long. Thus, the advice for the practice of meditation is to choose an appropriate object that can serve as a basis to keep the mind in a focused state.

There is a practice of meditation where one just focuses on using the mind itself as an object. So, not focusing on anything else but the vacuity, the spaciousness of the mind and one keeps the focus inward just on that. This is a technique where one focuses on nothing else but the spaciousness of one's mind. Adopting that technique and keeping the mind focused inward, does serve the purpose of withdrawing one's mind from external distractions. It doesn't disturb one's mind and during that period of time it is possible to achieve a relatively calm and peaceful state of mind.

There is, however, a question as to whether that sort of stability of mind can be maintained when one comes out of meditation and has to relate to the outside world again. Can that stability and calmness of the mind be maintained as we deal with external situations? That is

the biggest question. As I have emphasised many times previously, meditation techniques should lead not just to a focused, calm and relaxed mind during meditation but also have a positive effect when one comes out of meditation to deal with the outside world.

The objects and techniques which have been presented earlier in the teachings and that we are training in now, serve as means to bring the mind inward not only during the meditation session, but also enables one to be focused in our daily life. The various techniques presented in the teachings help the mind to maintain a certain level of stability and calmness when one still engages with the many distractions in the outside world. That is something that we need to try to adopt.

The essential tools that one develops in one's practice of meditation are mindfulness and introspection. These tools are used in one's practice of meditation to maintain focus on the chosen object. But it is equally important to try to apply mindfulness and introspection when one is out of the meditation session dealing with the outside world. One must understand that applying mindfulness and introspection is not only to maintain focus on the chosen object, but also to restrain one's mind from opposing objects.

The opposing objects are objects that disturb one such as the objects of one's desire. If there is a particular object that one has a particularly strong attachment or desire towards then as soon as we recall that object it immediately agitates and disturbs the mind. In order for one's actual meditation session to be successful one should be able to maintain the stability of one's mind when one is out of meditation. One must be aware of how the object of desire disturbs one's mind and thus restrain oneself from focusing on the object of desire.

The main point of mindfulness is to restrain ourselves from focusing on the object of desire. Are we being mindful and using introspection, to check within oneself whether we are restraining ourselves from the object of desire or not? Even though during meditation one may not seem to be disturbed by the object of desire, because one is focused on the particular chosen object of one's meditation, if one does not continuously apply mindfulness and introspection, then as soon as one comes out of the practice of meditation one will be completely engulfed by the object of desire again. Once out of meditation the mind will become completely chaotic again.

When this happens there are many who actually blame the practice of meditation. While the practice of meditation was not done properly, there are many who claim that despite having done meditation it seems my desires increase! 'When I come out of meditation', they say, 'It seems that my desire and attachment are even stronger.' The reality is not that desire has become stronger, but the fact that one has not properly applied mindfulness and introspection during one's practice and has kept part of one's mind continuously engaged with the object of desire or attachment. That is the problem.

One must pay particular attention and really find out what is disturbing one's mind. There are situations where one may come to a point where whatever activity one

engages in, it doesn't seem to carry much weight and doesn't seem meaningful anymore. One's whole life may be affected when the normal activities that one engages in are not enjoyable any more. When one eats you don't enjoy your meal as much anymore. The people who you used to get along well with suddenly don't seem to bring joy any more. Other activities that normally feel relaxing and enjoyable, such as sleeping, are not really enjoyable any more. It comes to a point where one finds any activity that is normally considered relaxing and enjoyable is not much joy any more. In fact whatever one does, worldly activity or spiritual activity, one feels that one has come to a point where it doesn't seem to work any longer and one has a very heavy feeling, as if one is weighed down by life itself.

When one comes to this point it is extremely important that we try to come out of that state. The longer that we remain in that sort of sinking state of mind the more it affects our life to the point where we will actually not be able to function normally any more. Anything we do will not have much meaning any more. This is a very dangerous situation to be in. We will be dominated by that heavy state of mind and just spiral down further if we don't do anything about it. As soon as we recognise that we have come into a situation like this we must definitely make the effort to come out of the situation. We have the potential and ability to do this.

One comes into this state of feeling weighed down by everything by allowing one's mind to be obsessed. One is influenced by an object that is disturbing one, whether it is a situation or a person, and allowing one's mind to be preoccupied; not making any effort to come out of that situation and constantly allowing oneself to be preoccupied with the objects that are distracting one.

One must investigate what is it in one's mind that is dominating the mind to make one feel weighed down by everything. As we investigate we come to really pinpoint and recognise, if we are sincere, that it is either because of a strong desire that we are not able to satisfy and are becoming preoccupied with, or that there could be some sort of anger in our mind, and the more we think about that object of anger the more it makes us feel bitter. Or it could be jealousy, or a feeling of competitiveness with others or pride. Basically, when we look into our situation it's really focused on either of these states of mind that may be dominating us. As long as we allow those states of mind, strong desire, anger, hatred, pride or jealousy to dominate our mind then our mind is weighed down.

The whole purpose of meditation is to bring us out of that situation. The means and way to bring us out of that situation is to follow the proper technique of meditation. When one comes out of formal meditation, one should try to constantly maintain mindfulness and introspection and as soon as one sees one's mind being influenced by a negative state of mind or start thinking about an object that disturbs one tries to avert oneself and not allowing oneself to go in that direction. We do have the ability and power to avoid that. If we do apply this process then we can see that slowly, slowly our mind becomes more and more relaxed, steady and calm. In meditation, or out of meditation, at all times one begins to notice that there is a

sort of steadiness that occurs in one's mind. This is something really worthwhile to achieve as we continue our practice.

If one applies the proper technique, during and after meditation sessions with mindfulness and introspection, then gradually we will find that our mind becomes more stable and we will begin to experience a joy in one's mind that we seemed to lack earlier. The joy will be restored in one's mind and become quite stable and one can maintain that joy even when difficult situations arise. One can maintain that joy in one's mind through the proper practice of meditation.

Otherwise the alternative for many is to rely on external, abusive substances such as alcohol, drugs, smoking and so forth. Many people do find solace or resort to those substances because they don't find any other method or technique to try to bring some joy or happiness to their mind. Because they fail to see that they have the potential or the resources for real joy and happiness within their own mind, they resort to other substances that definitely harm their mind and body.

There is a great danger for youngsters and teenagers around 17 or 18 years of age of falling into that trap of abusing themselves with substances. It is really important, particularly for youngsters, to protect themselves. Teenagers may not really have their full ability, understanding and potential developed within them yet. Because it is the most crucial time in their life, they need their elders', particularly their parents, help. At this particularly crucial time parents must be most understanding, and most helpful, towards their children.

One must not immediately blame the child for not doing the right things. If someone notices that they are starting to use substances like alcohol, drugs, smoking and so forth one must see what is leading them to do that. What is the cause? If they start missing school, start feeling unhappy and grumpy, don't do their studies and so forth it indicates something. It means that they are not really happy in their life. There is something that is disturbing their mind. The things they do are only symptoms of disturbance in their mind.

As a responsible parent, if one wishes to see one's child not go down a negative path but wants them to be a successful responsible, human being one must help at this most crucial time. The way to help is to try to really be friends with them and not to try to restrict everything. If they don't go to school don't say, 'I won't allow you to do this, or I won't buy you that' and so forth, always restricting them. That sort of technique only makes them feel worse. Threatening them with no gifts and so forth, will just make a rebellious feeling even stronger. Instead, the way to help them is to really be friends with them. If one shows real sincerity in wanting to be friends with them and tries to understand them they will open with what is bothering them. Then one will be able to recognise what the problem is.

Thus, by recognising the real problem, the real issue that's bothering them, you might be able to help them. If one doesn't understand the real problem but only sees the skipping school, or taking drugs, or not studying hard as the main problem, then one is not able to really help

them because one is not seeing the underlying causes for their behaviour. One must begin by being friends and then one can understand their problem. I often advise parents who have teenagers to be very careful and use their skilful means in trying to help them. That is really the most essential time they need your help in their lives.

For those of us who do experience difficulty in our life and have the symptom of being weighed down by difficulties and problems and all of the disadvantages that come with that feeling, need to practise the proper technique of meditation. If we begin to sincerely apply the proper technique in overcoming our own problems, we will experience some positive outcome. How positive the outcome of our practice is will depend on how sincerely we do our practice. When we are really sincere and practice diligently with mindfulness and introspection we can experience a positive outcome.

The positive outcome is something that we can confidently share with others. We can really benefit others because we have had the experience of having problems and difficulties, and being weighed down and feeling hopeless, in short all of the shortcomings and problems of life, but then we have been able to overcome that. We have been able to get relatively good progress from our practice of meditation. If, with the experience and knowledge that we have, we can help others it will be really, really beneficial for them. We don't need to try to force advice on others. Through our own experience we will be able to naturally and very gently guide others in their practice. That becomes a very unique, genuine assistance to others.

As we practice meditation to bring about a settled and calm mind for ourselves the emphasis is on developing love and compassion. The reason why that is stressed is that if we do experience positive results for ourselves, we will then be naturally inclined to help others. We will naturally have that wish to help others and we can be effective through our practice. The cultivation of love and compassion, as mentioned regularly in the teachings, is something of great value. As we progress and find that real peace within ourselves, as we are working towards peace in our own mind, we will naturally be inclined to also benefit others and when we do get the means through the experience of the positive results of our own practice we will be naturally and spontaneously able to help others. It will be beneficial for others because of the kind attitude we have.

It is essential that, from the very outset of our practice, we try to cultivate the genuine attitude of love and compassion. That genuine attitude of love and compassion begins with someone that you associate with and is close to you. As we engage in our practice we will naturally be cultivating love and compassion along with the progress that we make in our meditation. When we do get the results of the practice of meditation, as mentioned previously, we will then be able to spontaneously, naturally benefit others.

Benefiting others need not be a grand thing. Initially it is not realistic or possible for us to be able to help many people in a grand way. But it is worthwhile if we can help one or two people, even one person. If we can really

genuinely help one person well through our own practice, through our genuine attitude of love and compassion, that is highly worthwhile because that one person who genuinely benefits from our help will be able to help another person. Then if they extend their help to only one other person, because it is a real, genuine and altruistic help it will be beneficial and then that other person who has benefited from that may be able to help *another* person. Extending our help to one person may seem very limited, but if we think about the positive chain reaction that it creates we actually benefit many people in the long term in that way. Thus we can see it is a very practical way of benefiting other beings.

Looking at that earlier example of the situation of a family we can see the positive ripple effect, or chain reaction, also works very genuinely within a family situation. If the parents, the mother and father, are both interested in the practice of meditation and through the practice of meditation develop a genuine, kind mind, then the children will naturally be influenced in that way. Because the parents' upbringing of their children done with a genuinely loving and kind attitude, that positive state of mind will definitely influence the children. Thus the children will be brought up with that real nurturing love and affection. Then, they will also naturally be kind people and be interested in being kind to others. Thus, when they have children of their own, their children will also be brought up in that nurturing and affectionate way and then their children will also be brought up in that way. In this way we can see that the ripple effect of a genuine practice of developing a loving, kind attitude can pass down through many generations. We can see certain communities where, for many generations, they have had people who are really loving and kind.

We can now spend some time practising meditation. Even though it seems that I get a little bit sidetracked and elaborate a lot about meditation I do that because of my concern for you, particularly to those who seem to be weighed down with problems and difficulties. It is not that I am in any way claiming that I have clairvoyance, which means to be able to read others mind. It is just through my interaction and experience with people that live in the West that I begin to notice that some times that what you consider as a big problem is just a way of thinking. It's just an attitude that seems to bother the mind, and seems to make the problem big and grand, and weighs you down to darken life. What I see sometimes is that getting rid of the problem is just a matter of shifting your attitude. If you can make a little effort in shifting your way of thinking, things can change. It can make your mind much lighter. Life can start to glow again. There will be more meaning in your life. I can somehow sense that, not through clairvoyance, but just through my experience. As I can sense this I feel compelled to try to impart whatever advice I can share with you. I see that as being important and useful for you. It seems that I take a little time and elaborate on all of this, but it is with an intention to help you. Whether it actually benefits you and helps you or not is something that I am not sure. You have to find out for yourself.

I share my advice with the hope that it can help you in some way. I can vouch that I have no other ulterior

motive at all. I am just a simple monk who does not need much. I can take quite good care of myself and there is no other motive other than to benefit you. If it can be of some benefit then I feel that is worth spending time and energy in going over this again and again. If it can help to shift your attitude and brighten your life again, then it serves the purpose. That is what I am attempting and that is the reason why I mention all of this. Yet there are some who say, 'Well, what you say is very true and good, but it may be possible for you to do, but Geshe-la, you are different from us. You are different to me and I cannot apply that to my practice and situation.' They are saying, 'Geshe-la, all may be well with you, but this is my suffering'. Somehow they are very attached to their own suffering and problems, as if they don't want to let go of the problem. [Geshe la gestures with his hand grasping at his chest] 'My, my, my problem. That's my problem. That's my problem.'

Having elaborated on the technique, the purpose and the benefits of the practice of meditation, we can now spend some time in meditation. An essential point of the practice of meditation that we adopt here is that the object that we use to focus on is our own breath. Some may underestimate the value of focusing on one's breath, thinking, 'Oh, that's very simple, that's not a very grand object'. But in fact, as explained in the teachings, focusing on the breath is a very valuable means to reduce one's conceptual thoughts, which are the distractions. The main obstacle to having a focused mind that we face in our practice is the disturbing thoughts that constantly bombard us. All of these different thoughts are called conceptual thoughts. That is the most immediate difficulty, the biggest obstacle that we face right now. Through focusing on the breath one can actually experience immediate relief from all the conceptual thoughts subsiding and the mind becoming more calm and settled.

The reason that this is so is because of the simplicity of the object. It is our breath; it's not something very alien. It's not as if it's some sort of grand object. It's just our breath. It is simple because we don't have to focus on something that has a particular shape or colour; just simply having a mental image of the breath. And in fact, because it is colourless and shapeless it is very effective in helping the mind to settle down. Because of the habituation of our mind it can be very easily influenced by nice colour,s or nice shapes. If it was an object that had nice, bright colours we might get distracted through attachment to that. If it had a nice shape, we might become distracted by that nice shape. Because the breath itself is colourless and shapeless it is a most conducive object for settling our mind. It is very effective and one should not underestimate the value of focusing on the breath. It becomes, especially for us beginners, a most beneficial practice and we can find its effectiveness immediately. So, for the next few minutes we will settle down, distance our minds from all external distractions and focus on the natural inflow and outflow of our breathing and keep our mind focused 100% on the breath. *(Pause for meditation.)*

That should be sufficient for this evening. Before we conclude the session we can recite the mantra of Buddha Shakyamuni, and focus on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

As the weather seems quite turbulent with a lot of wind and rain, would those who are driving please be careful and drive safely. In Tibet the normal saying when someone parts after visiting is, 'Please ride your horse safely.' Here, in place of that, I am saying, 'Drive safely.'

Giving that advice to ride your horse safely does not only imply not to ride your horse fast because it's dangerous, it also implies that when riding horses, even though you are riding slowly, there may be times when horses get very startled by small birds that nest along the way. When the horse passes by the birds gets startled and fly up and startle the horse. If you're not riding steadily the horse could throw you off. *[laughter]* Experienced horses are fine but some horses get startled right away. Similarly with driving, you may feel, 'I am driving slowly and well' but if one is not really aware someone else might hit you. You have to be aware of how others are driving around you.

*Transcribed from tape by Peter Boothby
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