
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual, it would be good to spend some time for meditation in order to become a good meditator, so that even if your neighbour were to poke you, they would not disturb your concentration. In fact, joking aside, if we were to be able to reach a level of concentration where no matter what is going around us we could stay focussed and meditate, wouldn't that be a great achievement? Otherwise it seems whenever we try to meditate the slightest disturbance, such as someone making a noise, can immediately disturb us. Rather than creating a positive mind, this causes an afflicted mind to arise, which is unfortunate when we are trying to meditate. If we can achieve a state where no matter what is going around us, we maintain our focus and concentration and keep a positive mind, then this would be a great achievement.

Even on a practical level, thinking along those lines is worthwhile. It is essential that we pay attention to this, otherwise when we go into a meditation we can go in with a happy and smiling attitude, but by the time the meditation finishes we come out with a lot of aggression in our mind. For example, having heard what was going on around us in the meditation session, when we come out of meditation, we may confront the person.

We can keep these practical goals in our mind when we meditate. The purpose of meditation is to try to subdue our mind and reach a level where we have a more peaceful mind and where we do not become so vulnerable to disturbances around us. If we can initially achieve a level where we do not get too disturbed, then this really is a practical benefit of meditation. Otherwise as mentioned previously, if we are so easily provoked and so vulnerable to disturbances around ourselves, then we get an agitated mind. This also affects others around us negatively.

To quote from the Buddha, 'A subdued mind is a happy mind'. What the Buddha is saying is that when the mind is subdued it is not so vulnerable and easily provoked by disturbances and afflictions arising in the mind. This is a happy mind. So it is good to take that advice to heart and to remind ourselves that the purpose of our meditation practice, in accordance to the Buddha's advice, is to have a subdued mind, which brings about a happy mind. The purpose of our practice is to achieve a subdued mind.

It is important that we actually spend some time to look within ourselves and try to really investigate what brings about a disturbed, agitated mind. As we investigate, we notice that it depends a lot on our attitude. Depending on certain kind of attitudes we have, the mind becomes vulnerable and prone to becoming easily upset. So, when

we try to maintain a positive attitude, then that helps the mind to have a tranquil and peaceful outlook. We must use instances in our lives as a measure for that investigation. When we have a disturbed mind, rather than immediately blaming outer circumstances, which are just temporary conditions, we can look within ourselves and see what kind of attitude we have when the mind is agitated and disturbed. Certain attitudes that we maintain in our mind lead to the mind becoming easily agitated and disturbed. The real problem comes from within us, not from the outside. Likewise, the causes that bring about a happy state of mind, lie within us, not externally. External circumstances only serve as temporary conditions for us to be happy, but the real cause for a happy mind is within.

We can then investigate further for those who have all the attractive external conditions, such as wealth, a big house, the biggest TV, the biggest group of friends and well-wishers and so forth. Even with all of that, it does not guarantee someone to be happy. We can see clearly through our experiences. When we investigate and look around, we can clearly see that even with the best external circumstances and conditions, the person who experiences them is not necessarily a happy person. We might have relatively comfortable conditions such as a good TV and so forth, but we may have noticed that our mind still feels a certain degree of restlessness and unhappiness. So why does that happen? If just having good external conditions were to make us happy, then having the best external conditions should make us the happiest. But we know that's not true from own experiences. So we must investigate and look further into why we lack mental happiness, even when our external conditions are relatively good.

As I regularly emphasise, it is really important that we protect our own mind from adverse circumstances, from disturbances, agitations and so forth. We do this by internal investigation and doing an internal analysis of our state of mind. We must really try to identify which states of mind lead to a disturbed mind. What kind of attitude in the mind leads to a disturbed mind? What attitude makes us feel agitated, distressed and hopeless? Is it a realistic attitude? Is it based on reality? We must first identify that attitude. Likewise, we must also identify what kind of attitude brings comfort to the mind, and makes it feel settled, restful, and helps the mind to be in a positive state. We need to check our mind for these attitudes. And this is really the purpose of meditation. Meditation doesn't mean just sitting down rigidly in a corner focusing on an object. If we use self-analysis or self-investigation in our daily lives in checking our mind, then we come to a point where it becomes clear as to what kind of attitudes lead to a disturbed mind, and what kind of positive attitudes lead to a restful, joyful and happy mind, and this is also a form of meditation.

Having identified those attitudes, the next step is to begin to slowly reduce or minimise the attitudes that lead to a disturbed mind, and try to increase the attitudes that lead to a positive mind. This cannot be done immediately, but through practise and familiarity we can begin to slowly increase the positive attitudes and slowly decrease the negative attitudes. We don't need to worry about any

esoteric practises. We should just investigate and use self-analyse to increase the positive states of mind, and slowly minimise the negative states of mind and our negative attitudes. This is as much as we can handle right now, and it is really practical and beneficial for us in our daily lives.

The practice of dharma at our level basically means doing self-investigation, which encourages us to behave well. The outcome of the practice of dharma is to bring about good conduct for beings who practise the dharma. Good conduct basically means good behaviour. Having good conduct as a result of practising dharma begins with us. It is not about trying to change others or transforming them to be good and behave well. That is not where we begin. Rather we begin by changing what was previously ill behaviour into better behaviour. Good behaviour falls into three categories: physical, verbal and mental. Good physical conduct means checking our physical actions by making sure that we are physically behaving well and refraining from negative conduct. Verbally, we refrain from negative conduct and adopt good speech. Mentally we also refrain from negative conduct and adopt positive conduct.

Negative conduct can be defined as physical, verbal or mental actions that are harmful to others and eventually us. Inappropriate behaviour is what we call negative conduct, whereas positive conduct is beneficial to others and ourselves. When we look into the three aspects of our conduct - physical, verbal and mental - we can see how our conduct affects others. When we have a negative state of mind, then it affects our verbal and our physical conduct, which becomes inappropriate and is not appreciated by others. The conduct that arises from a negative state of mind naturally translates as inappropriate behaviour. So when we begin by correcting our own conduct that is what we call the practice of dharma. Based on that, we can eventually relate positively to others.

If we have a negative or agitated state of mind, or if we develop ill-will towards others which is based on anger, what kind of mental state are we in? Likewise when that translates into speech, then what kind of speech comes out of our mouth? How that does that affect others? That is something we need to look into. From our own experience, when we are agitated, we experience some sort of upset in our mind. If we then say something to others, even someone whom we live with, then what kind of speech comes out? Is it positive or negative speech? And not to mention the speech we use with people we completely dislike, or someone we consider an enemy? What are the ill effects of using that kind of speech in a negative state of mind? What are the consequences for us, leaving aside what the consequences may be for others? This is something that we really need to look into.

Even though we may think that it may harm others when we use inappropriate speech such as harsh words to someone we don't like, it is doubtful whether the words actually harm them. If the other person is someone who is patient, then even if we spoke inappropriately or used harsh words, rather than harming them, they would welcome it. They need others to test their patience. It

enhances their practice of patience, so they welcome inappropriate speech or any speech with ill will. Instead of harming a patient person, it actually benefits them.

However, harsh speech definitely harms us. As soon as we have a negative state of mind such as a harmful intent in our mind, then using harsh speech will immediately have an ill effect on us. For those who we consider our friends, we might use nice speech. This is fine because when we speak appropriately to others, we also feel good about it. However, using inappropriate speech to people we think are obnoxious, or who we feel are not on our favourite list, does harm us. So we need to protect our own mind from inappropriate speech, which is the negative conduct of speech that begins from an agitated state of mind. When we see the ill effects on ourselves, then that should encourage us to refrain from engaging in such inappropriate activities. This is how we begin to practise the dharma.

As mentioned previously, we need not be concerned right now with other kinds of esoteric practices, such as some sort of grand practice, which we need to go far away to do. Right here in our living environment, the very place and the very people that we associate with daily, is where we need to begin our dharma practice on a practical level. Practising a spiritual path is something that we start right now from where we are. Our daily lives, with the people who we associate with, that is the most essential place for us. We need to begin our dharma practice with these people. This is practical for us as we will experience the positive benefits.

To emphasise the point again - dharma practice begins in our everyday lives. It is something we really need to take notice of and try to remind ourselves about again and again. Dharma practice is not doing some esoteric practice in some exotic land. Practising dharma begins in our everyday lives with the people that we associate with everyday. It is completely interconnected and related with our everyday life. The idea of practising dharma is to improve our everyday lives, to try to have a better quality life for ourselves and those around us, our family, our partners and so forth. It is through practising dharma that we contribute to the harmony and peace of others.

As we work on subduing our own mind and having a positive mental attitude, we can then extend our help by beginning with the person we live with. We can extend our help towards them with appropriate speech, appropriate actions and appropriate attitude. Based on that, we can help others by slowly extending that attitude towards others we associate with in our daily lives. We can extend help by even uttering a few nice words to them, or giving them some food when they are hungry, or saying something nice when others are feeling down and depressed. Those are the times when our help is most appreciated by others. That is the time when they really need help.

When they are feeling down and depressed, if we can say a few nice words that can uplift their mind, then that is something that they will really appreciate; they will never forget that. When they are feeling depressed and low, they may feel as if the whole world is against them; if someone comes up to them and speaks nicely and gives a

few words of support, then they will completely relate to it and really appreciate it. Likewise, for someone who is hungry and doesn't have the means to buy or make a good meal: if someone offers them a meal, then that is something that they will never forget.

There is a natural human appreciation for those who help at the most difficult times. So our help need not be grand, such as saving the world, but it can begin with the very people that we live with and slowly extend to a few others. Even if we can help four or five people in our lives, then that is really worthwhile. This can form a chain reaction where they can extend their help to others as well. So our help can be really beneficial and practical in that way.

Beginning a dharma practice with people who we associate with in our daily lives is a sound, reasonable and logical way to begin. As we do self-analysis and look into what disturbs our mind, when we are feeling depressed or if we are experiencing anxiety or any kind of physical or mental problem, particularly in relation to the mental attitudes, based on our own efforts to overcome that we can then help others. When we have gone through some struggle ourselves and then found the means to help our own mind through practising dharma or meditation, then through the benefit that we gain on a practical level, we can share our experiences with others.

When others are feeling distressed and having difficulties, we may then share from our own experience and knowledge. We can relate to them, and can understand the difficulties they are going through. As we work with ourselves, we can slowly begin to extend our help to others. And as we share what we experience, we can try to help them lift up their mind. We can comfort them and the comfort will be genuine. You might actually be able to help them in such an effective way that they may begin to wonder if you can read their minds. They might think, 'Wow this person can read my mind because they can give me such good advice'. But actually it is really based on our own experience that we are sharing.

What I share is always with an attitude of wishing to benefit. That is my only attitude and motivation. I am always concerned about how my talks can help others by changing their attitude, how it can help their lives and bring a little more happiness in their lives. It is out of that concern and that motivation that I share whatever I share with you. Of course in no way am I trying to imply that I know more than you. We are all equal in having gone through difficulties and problems; it is something we have all gone through and I have gone through my own share of difficulties as well. However, through my own experiences and having gone through difficulties, I have really spent time in trying to work out what is the best way to have a subdued and more peaceful mind. Even though I may not have gone through similar problems and difficulties that you have gone through such as relationship problems, by relating with many people and some who have talked to me about their problems, and with that sort of feedback from others, I do spend a lot of time in thinking about the best way to attain the right attitude through our meditation practice in order to have a better, more meaningful life. So even though I cannot

claim that I have mastered and have great realisations, I have thought a lot about how to have a subdued mind, and try to practise myself. Through my own investigation I feel that I can share a bit of what I have gone through and relate it to you with the intention that it may benefit you.

Now for the actual practice of a formal meditation we sit in a relaxed posture. One of the main reasons that the mind becomes agitated is we allow the mind to become completely distracted, letting it go in every direction possible. Here in a formal meditation, what we do is try to withdraw our mind from the distractions. This means we simply do not let the mind be influenced by any thoughts and ideas that come up, but focus the mind inward and keep it on the object to be focussed on. Withdraw our mind from external and internal distractions, and bring the focus of our mind inward. For the purpose of this meditation, the object that we choose is our own breath. We bring our full attention and focus on the breath, which is basically being aware and giving our full attention and awareness of the natural rhythm of our breath, the inflow and outflow of our breath. Keep the mind completely focussed on that, and do not let it waiver from that. Keep our mind one hundred percent focussed on the breath. *(Pause for meditation).*

Question: What is Geshe-la's attitude towards loss? In Australia we tend to celebrate loss, such as the recent Anzac Day celebrations, but also the loss of a job, or a car.

In relation to the first part of the question about celebrations such as Anzac day, it could be seen in a positive light. It seems to me that it is about remembering those who have contributed to society. Remembering the loss means remembering what they have done. Some of them may have been kind and contributed to family, country and nation. It seems to be a day of remembrance rather than loss. Rather than generating sadness, if we can generate some sort of encouragement in our mind, then that would be significant. In the past others have contributed, sacrificing their lives and so forth. Because of those actions we have the conditions we enjoy now, so we must try to also do good actions now. Anzac Day can be seen in that kind of light.

For those who have some training in developing love and compassion, it could also be a good day to generate love and compassion towards those who have passed away, and those who survived and lived through difficult circumstances. This could be a way of increasing love and compassion. But also it could be a way of in remembering their loss, and thinking about how that came about. In remembering those tragedies we can remind ourselves, and others, not to let those tragedies happen again, what led to those tragedies, and how can we prevent them. There is also a Tibetan saying, 'Not to forget the kindness of others'. In relation to Anzac Day, we remember others who fought and sacrificed their lives for the nation. Remembrance Day is seen as significant on nation wide basis, because we cannot afford to forget what they did and seeing that as their kindness.

It seems that every nation has a day of commemorating a day to remember those in the past who sacrificed their lives. That is how I would interpret it, but because it is an

Australian and New Zealand ceremony, it is best to ask them. People who celebrate the day must know the significance.

Question: Is Geshe-la able to disclose in more detail the techniques on the breathing techniques of the breath on meditation?

The physical aspect of the technique is where we breathe naturally, and we don't label it as breathing. We don't take in a very deep or shallow breath, but just in a natural rhythm; and very gently so that preferably others do not hear the actual inhalation and exhalation. It's as if you don't feel the air, it's just very natural. Breathe in very gently and naturally, and breathe out very gently and naturally. And based on that very gentle process, we keep a mental focus on by keeping count of the breath. We can achieve a goal by focussing on the breath up to a certain count. As we breathe in and breathe out, that is one count.

Then we just keep the mind completely focussed on the breath and the actual count of the breath. This helps maintain our awareness and our focus remains fresh. When our mind is properly focused on the breath by paying full attention to the breath, then it would take no more than twenty-one counts for the mind to be completely settled and to become clear. We must make sure that we are completely focussed on the breath first, and we do not allow the mind to be distracted by anything else. Once we have focussed on the breath, then we try to keep count of the breath up to twenty-one counts. By the time we reach the count of twenty-one, if we have done it properly, then the mind not only settles down but also becomes clear.

The analogy given is like a clear glass. When a glass bottle is washed, it is very clear, likewise the mind becomes clear when its agitated state is removed. However, this is not the whole practice, just the beginning. The focus on the breath is a prerequisite, because in a clear state of mind we can generate a positive state of mind. When glass is clear or if we have a clean cloth, we can dye them with any colour. Any colour can be applied to the glass and it will be seen clearly because the glass itself is clean. Likewise, when the mind is clear from disturbances, agitation, and distractions, then it becomes a good basis on which to generate a positive state of mind.

And then from that state of clear mind we can proceed on to any other meditation practise we may wish to engage in. For those who temporarily limit their practice by just focussing on the breath, when they reach that clear state then they can just maintain that clear state for a certain period of time. For those who go further into developing a positive or virtuous state of mind, then the clear state of mind becomes the perfect platform to generate a positive state of mind, such as love and compassion.

Without the basis of a clear mind, we may have noticed from our own experience that when we try to focus on anything, it seems that there are so many other things going on in our mind that our minds seem to be always busy. Even when we try to meditate, if we don't really put in some effort, then as soon as we try to meditate, somehow there are always some thoughts and ideas

which pop up in our mind. From that distracted state of mind, any practise we do is not fruitful. In order for our initial practices to bear fruit, we try to achieve a settled and clear mind.

Before we conclude for the evening, we can spend a few minutes in contemplation. As we sit in a proper, relaxed posture, we focus our mind on the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. When we recite it, we just keep our mind focussed on sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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