
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual it would be good to spend some time in meditation. For that purpose we sit in a relaxed and comfortable position. In a relaxed physical posture we can then generate a positive state of mind. The importance of generating a positive motivation is stressed in the teaching, so I regularly also stress the importance of having a good attitude in our mind.

We need to train in developing a positive motivation. It is not something that comes about naturally. We need to train our mind by generating a positive thought such as 'I wish to benefit all living beings.' In order to benefit any living being that we come into contact with, we need to firstly develop our own mind by subduing it. This motivation is appropriate because it is not stained with the self-cherishing mind, which is basically pursuing a selfish goal.

We generate a positive motivation with the wish to benefit all beings, particularly wishing all beings to be happy and to be free from all suffering. When we develop such an attitude in our mind, which is indiscriminately wishing all beings to be happy and to be free from all suffering, then that is basically working towards our own goal as well.

We can relate our wish, which is to be happy and to be free from all suffering, to others. When we see how others have exactly the same wish and goal as us, then it becomes reasonable for us to focus on others. Wishing others to have happiness and to be free from all suffering shifts the focus from ourselves to extend it to other sentient beings. This becomes a sound basis for us to develop love and compassion - focussing on other beings.

We have the potential to develop love and compassion towards others, but it seems difficult for love and compassion to arise spontaneously in our mind. This is because we are not yet familiar with the attitude of wishing others happiness and wishing them to be free from suffering. By generating a positive motivation, we are re-enforcing and familiarising ourselves with that basic positive attitude, which is the basis for developing love and compassion. So the more we familiarise ourselves with the attitude of wishing others happiness and to be free from suffering, to that extent we are making our mind more receptive to developing real genuine love and compassion towards others.

A practical way to strengthening and cultivating the attitude of wishing others to have happiness and to be free from all suffering, is to recognise how others are deprived of the sources of happiness and have so many conditions under which they suffer. When we focus on how others lack the resources to attain happiness and are in circumstances where they are experiencing so much suffering, then we can familiarise our mind with that attitude. As much as it strengthens our attitude of love and compassion towards others, at the same time it will also benefit us. Our mind will

experience more joy and happiness. This is because when we focus on how others are deprived of the resources for happiness and are experiencing suffering, then we notice that we are not really deprived. We have so many resources for happiness, but we are not in the same circumstances where we experience immense suffering, like others. We begin to notice that our own condition is actually far better than others and that realisation will contribute to a real source of joy and happiness within.

The reason why we feel depressed and unhappy is because we do not really acknowledge the favourable circumstances that we have. This is because of our own self-cherishing mind. Self-cherishing is an attitude or a state of mind that only focuses on ourselves and on our own interests. When we only focus on ourselves, this attitude causes us to feel that we are deprived of happiness and that we are suffering immensely, but we are just exaggerating our own situation. When we compare our situation to many others, we can clearly see that we actually do have good circumstances. But because we are only focussing on ourselves, we exaggerate our own unfavourable situation. Also, the attitude of self-cherishing and focusing only on our own interests begins to distance us from others. We become isolated and think that no one cares for or loves us, and we think everyone is against us. But actually it is our own mind thinking about that. In fact, our self-interest will also develop a state of mind that tries to gain things for our own joy at the expense of others.

Developing that sort of mind, 'as long as my needs are met, then I don't care if it harms others or not' is a self-cherishing mind. That sort of attitude can offend others and put people off. Because of our self-interest we may actually engage in attitudes or behaviour, which cut off people. This is because we are only focusing on our needs and are neglecting their concerns and interests. This attitude distances us from others while we may think 'Oh no one loves me, no one cares for me' but in fact we created that situation ourselves out of our own self-cherishing mind and self-interest. The main cause for bringing about an unhappy mind is the self-cherishing mind, and we can overcome that by focusing on others and cherishing them. This develops the basis of love and compassion towards others, and that in return will benefit us.

When we begin to see the practical benefits of developing this positive attitude, this good motivation, then we can try to train ourselves in cultivating this positive attitude. But this doesn't come naturally because we are not familiar with it. For the attitude of love and compassion to become more spontaneous, we need to train ourselves. We need to train our mind to change our attitudes. We are familiar with the attitude of focusing on ourselves and our own interests. So we need to change that by focusing more outwardly and thinking about how other sentient beings are deprived of happiness. And even though they don't wish for suffering, they are experiencing immense suffering.

Thinking along these lines on a daily basis, beginning from the morning we can cultivate an attitude of wishing others happiness and to be free from suffering. We start by familiarising ourselves with positive attitudes, then love and compassion will become more spontaneous.

As we train ourselves in developing love and compassion towards others, we can also further familiarise ourselves with karma. Karma is the law of cause and effect sequence. When we focus on others' lack of happiness, we can further

contemplate on why they lack happiness. Even though they wish for happiness, they lack the resources to achieve happiness. And even though they don't want to experience suffering, they are experiencing immense suffering, much more than us. Why is that? As we reflect on and analyse the teachings of karma, we can remind ourselves that things do not come about causelessly. Any experience and effect does not come about without any causes and conditions. Everything has a cause and condition for it to happen.

Unhappiness and suffering come about from previous causes. These causes were already created; no one is actually inflicting suffering on others. No one is intentionally robbing others of their happiness and inflicting pain on them. Anyone who is in a situation where they are unhappy and are experiencing suffering is actually experiencing the effects of their own karma. They are experiencing the effect from the causes that they have created in the past. It is not a punishment by someone else; they are experiencing the results of their own past actions. Whatever unhappiness and suffering we experience is also the result of our past karma, the causes that have created in the past.

As we reflect on other people's sufferings and their lack of happiness and in trying to help them, first of all we need to reduce suffering and increase happiness within ourselves. By reflecting on that, we become encouraged to refrain from creating the causes. Be determined to think, 'I must not create the causes for suffering, and I must prevent myself from creating the causes which lead to a state of unhappiness'. This becomes a very strong impetus and reason to create virtue, which is the cause of happiness.

Reflecting on this in our daily life is a good meditation, and we can really begin to identify what is the practice of dharma. In this analysis, first of all we begin by thinking about how we want to be happy and don't want to suffer. When we lack joy and happiness and experience suffering, then we need to reflect upon the causes of that and analyse just how this comes about. And then we can reflect on how we do not wish to experience those kinds of unfavourable circumstances, and neither do others, - they think exactly the same as us in that they want happiness and don't want to suffer. So it is worthwhile for us to focus on their happiness and wellbeing as well as ours.

Other people are in an exactly the same situation as us, as far as wishing to have favourable circumstances to achieve happiness and wishing to avoid circumstances for suffering; basically wanting happiness and avoiding suffering. Why is that? To confirm that we are in fact exactly the same, that others and we have the same interests. We can reflect on the basic predominant attitude that we all have, which is clinging to the self.

All other beings equally have the same attitude of seeing the self as being the most important. That clinging to the self, holding onto the self, the self or 'I', becomes the source of wishing something favourable for the 'I' and wishing to avoid anything that is unfavourable to the self. So naturally, as long as there is a clinging to the 'I' or the self, there is the clinging or the wish for favourable circumstances for the self and wishing to avoid unfavourable circumstances for the self. This is exactly the same for everyone else as well. We can see how we are all equal and the same. As we go further into generating a positive attitude, we can see that this becomes a full practice; having a positive attitude is how all practices are connected and related. A positive attitude or motivation is a prerequisite for any practice.

Now to explain a bit on contemplative meditation, it is the technique where we intentionally choose an object to focus on and then discipline our mind to maintain our focus on that chosen object. The familiarising and maintaining of our focus on a specific object is the definition of contemplative meditation. We need to keep the mind focussed on a particular object and not waiver our attention away from it.

So as far as the explanation of meditation goes, it is very simple, reasonable and practical. But when we actually come to try to do the meditation, we find that it is hard to keep our mind focussed on the object. So why is it so difficult to keep one's mind focussed on an object, particularly when it sounds so simple? According to the teachings, the reason why we can't keep our mind focussed and still is because the mind is under the influence of delusions. As long as we allow the mind to be distracted by delusions, they will make it harder for the mind to become focussed. Delusions are the main obstacles to a focussed mind.

Recognising this empowers us to be determined not to allow our mind to be under the influence of delusions. This is the training. The training itself involves disciplining our mind and to be determined not to allow the mind to be swayed by delusions or distractions during our meditation. The delusions can be the mental state itself and the distractions can be the combination of the delusion of the mind being distracted with the objects. So in the practice we are reminded again and again to distance ourselves from delusions and distractions. This is done with the two main tools presented in the meditation techniques, which are mindfulness and introspection. Being mindful of the object means maintaining our focus on the object. Introspection is where we have one part of the mind investigating and checking, to make sure that our mind is not becoming distracted.

On a gross level, as soon as we notice that our mind is becoming distracted, we immediately bring our mind back to the object. This is the process of meditation. Initially in the training, we just basically bring the mind back again and focus on the chosen object. If the mind is focussed, then we don't need to do much analysis but just maintain the focus. Maintaining focus is the function of mindfulness. However, we also have one part of the mind that is aware of our own state of mind, and we call that introspection. It can be described as a heightened awareness - being able to notice the mind when it gets distracted, and then to bring it back again when necessary and to make it remain focussed on the object. So in this way, we train our mind.

In our attempt to have a daily meditation practice, we might have noticed that there is always something that prevents the mind from becoming focussed. It may vary and change over time, but during a certain period of time there might be one particular thing amongst many others, the main factor that disturbs or distracts our mind. It is very important in our daily practice to be able to identify what it is that disturbs our mind. Does it have an element of attachment? Could the distractions be influenced by agitation and anger in our mind? What sort of mind is influencing our particular distractions?

We need to recognise what the main obstacle is in our meditation practice and then try to apply the antidote for overcoming that particular distraction. This becomes a practical way to try and maintain some sort of normality in our daily life. Otherwise if we don't pay attention to that, then we may be assuming that we are practicing meditation

when we are in fact, completely engrossed or influenced by distractions. So the first step is to identify and recognise the obstacles and distractions. This is important, and then we can apply the relevant antidote.

In order to make our practice of meditation fruitful and to derive some real tangible benefit from it, even if it's for a short session, we must do it wholeheartedly and sincerely. And that wholeheartedness and sincerity comes with the strong determination to distance our mind from distractions and delusions. Even though we may not yet be able to identify subtle levels of delusions, for our purpose we can basically summarise them all as just distractions, where the mind wanders and goes in every direction. To develop a sound practice and a good habit that we can continue on in our daily life, we need to distance our mind from all thoughts, bad or good, and keep it on the object of focus which is our breath.

(Pause for meditation).

We can see the practical benefits of a short practice of meditation in our regular daily life. It seems to really give us a good break, almost like a good massage of our body and mind; it's a good relaxing technique for our body and mind.

From the topic in the teaching, we are covering the topic of identifying delusions. The particular category of delusions that we are covering from the text is the ten delusions, which are divided into five non-speculative or non-views, and the five delusions that are speculative, or views. We have already covered the non-speculative delusions. The next category is the five delusions which are views or speculative. For the first one, some translations call it *the view of the transitory collections*, but the translation given in the text here is *the reifying view of the perishing aggregates* and it is an afflictive intelligence that observes the appropriated aggregates and regards them as 'I' or 'mine', which is a deluded and afflicted intelligence.

This particular deluded view called the *reifying view of the perishing aggregates* is a view that focuses on the contaminated physical and the mental aggregates that constitute a person. We focus on our aggregates and develop a strong notion of 'I' or 'me' based upon that. This brings a sense of 'I' or 'mine' by focusing on the self, or that which belongs to the self. We are discussing a general definition here that relates to all schools of Buddhism. It refers to the strong feeling we have of the 'I'. For example, when someone criticises us or we are offended in any way, we immediately get a strong feeling of 'I' or 'me'. That they are hurting 'me', that they are hurting this sense of 'me'. It is as if that 'I' or 'me' that we feel is offended or criticised is something tangible. We almost can feel it within ourselves. We refer to that notion within ourselves, the 'I' and 'me' and think that is who we really are. This is the misconception.

We have a strong sense of 'me' or 'I' as being very important when we focus on the aggregates, which are the results of delusions and karma. By focusing on the aggregates we get the notion of a very strong sense of 'I' and then following on from that strong sense of 'I' comes 'mine', holding importance to what is mine. With this view, we have a very strong clinging to 'I' and the belongings of the 'I' which is 'mine', and this is the main cause of all our problems.

Even on a conventional level, we talk about someone being really selfish and in Tibetan terms it is even more specific - that someone has strong self-grasping. When we refer to someone as having strong cherishing or strong self-grasping, in English it is called selfishness. So, even on a conventional

level holding onto a strong sense of 'me' or 'I' is considered inappropriate. The teaching goes into further detail about where and how this misconception of 'I' arises and how it is the source of all our problems.

The combination of words that make up the term for this wrong view is *the reifying view of the perishing aggregates*. The text explains why the wrong view is called *perishing*. The text explains that perishing means impermanent or transitory, and that aggregates is a plural term. The term indicates that what are apprehended are simply impermanent and multiple phenomena, and aggregates implies multiple. This indicates that there is no permanent and unitary person. This is why it is called the *view of the perishing aggregates*. Therefore the wrong conception that comes along with clinging to the self is that it is a permanent self or a unitary, single independent self. This is the misconception that comes with holding onto the self. Having this wrong view opposes the fact that we have perishing aggregates and it also implies that there is a permanent and unitary person.

Before we conclude the session for this evening, we will take a few minutes to spend some time in contemplation or meditation. This time we focus our attention on the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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