
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual it would be good to spend some time in meditation. It's good to find a comfortable posture for meditation; one should not be sitting in a rigid way but adopt a relaxed posture; it is important to have a comfortable and relaxed physical posture. However, just having the right posture doesn't really contribute that much to the real practice of meditation. Just having a relaxed body doesn't necessarily contribute to having a relaxed and calm mind. The body could be relaxed, but if the mind is constantly distracted with external thoughts and ideas then the mental state will still remain quite agitated and thus will not be relaxed.

We can all relate to this situation when we have a good and relaxed physical posture for meditation, but the mind is not focused and still very distracted. Since all of us have this experience, then isn't it worthwhile for us to find out why the mind is very distracted? The simple answer is, the mind functions in accordance with what it is already familiar with, and our mind is most familiar with the distractions. When the mind is constantly distracted, we don't need to put any effort into achieving this. It is spontaneously distracted because we are familiar with the mind focusing outward and thinking about external things and events, rather than observing what goes on within ourselves.

The reason that we are familiar with focusing outwardly is because we have never really paid attention to focusing inwardly. It has never previously occurred to us to focus internally. Until we realise that there is some benefit, we are not in the habit of looking inward and maintaining our focus inwardly. We naturally and spontaneously focus outwardly because we are seeking some form of pleasure. Ultimately we are seeking happiness, but in the short term we are seeking gratification and some form of immediate pleasure. When we focus on the objects of sensual pleasure, it provides some temporary gratification or pleasure. But we will come to slowly notice that even though we do gain some form of fleeting pleasure, deep down inside our mind still remains disturbed and agitated.

By constantly allowing our minds to focus outwardly we neglect focusing inwardly, and thus we are not familiar with looking within. Then when our mind is disturbed, we don't know how to handle that; we don't know how to work with it. Now one may ask the question, 'what would be the consequences if we just allowed our mind to be distracted? What is wrong with allowing our mind to be distracted, just letting it be? It is already familiar with being distracted by external things and events, and so just let the mind be in that natural state.' Most of us,

until this stage in our life, have done just that, to let our mind be distracted with external things and events, with sensual pleasures and so forth.

But we have now come to realise through our own experience that this has not brought us real satisfaction. It does not bring real calm and peace in our mind. In short, it doesn't bring real happiness for us. The consequences of allowing ourselves to be constantly distracted are that it just brings more and more disturbance, more and more complications and problems for us. It is a fact that by constantly focusing outward and constantly trying to pursue fleeting pleasures, we get into more problems, more difficulties, much more anxiety and worries in our mind. It definitely does not bring any amount of real satisfaction and contentment.

Even though we may come to the point of actually getting a glimpse into the reality of this, the fact is that we are not able to reverse this situation right away; it is as if we have no choice. We of course need to pay a certain amount of attention to external factors such as working at a job, taking care of our family and so forth. That is something that we need for our survival, so we do need to put a certain amount of attention towards that. However the problem arises when we allow ourselves to be completely immersed in the outside world.

In our situation it is a fact that we need to pay a certain amount of attention externally. Regardless of our status, whether we are rich or poor, whether we have a lot of possessions or lack possessions, whether we are educated or uneducated, all of us equally need to focus outwardly. A certain amount of external focus is based on our necessity for survival. However if we completely immerse ourselves in external distractions and particularly, the excessive distraction of sensual pleasures, that only leads to more complications, more anxiety and more problems in our lives.

Until we notice the reality of our situation and that it is the cause of a lot our anxiety and problems, the need to focus inwardly will not occur to us. But when we begin to notice the benefits of focusing inwardly, we can slowly try to familiarise ourselves with the techniques and the practice of looking at our own mind. By choosing an internal object to focus on, naturally our mind will withdraw from external distractions. In the process of learning how to do that, we will slowly become more and more familiar with being able to focus inwardly.

The ultimate goal of our practice is to maintain our composure and completely reverse our situation, not to be swayed by external distractions, but instead retain our awareness and our focus inwardly. The best result would be to reverse that situation by one hundred percent. Even if we were not able to reverse the situation of being completely influenced by the external distractions by one hundred percent, reversing it by sixty percent or fifty percent, plus a certain amount of awareness and stability by focusing inward would be a great achievement. When we are more in control of our mind it will dramatically change our life. Our mind will become much more self-contained and subdued. The practice of meditation is the means to achieve this. If we can actually put it into

practice, it would be highly beneficial. We will begin to see the positive results for ourselves.

One of the essential skills that we need to develop is the skill to determine the extent to which we are influenced by the external distractions, to see how we are allowing ourselves to be under the control of these external distractions. Conversely, also to be able to check to what extent we are able to restrain ourselves. The ability to know the difference does not come about naturally and spontaneously. It comes with a certain amount of awareness and particularly with an intelligence or wisdom which is specifically called an analytical wisdom, which differentiates between the mind being swayed by external distractions versus maintaining stability within oneself.

If one were to focus on an object within oneself, but one is not careful to really check into the state of one's mind, the mind may seem to be subdued and withdrawn but one could in fact, still be distracted within one's own meditation. Even while we are trying to focus and meditate, the distractions might still be occurring on another level. Thus it is very important that we develop the intelligence or wisdom that is able to distinguish, even at a subtle level, a distracted mind from a truly subdued mind. Analytical wisdom is an important tool. Along with analytical wisdom or intelligence, we also need to develop mindfulness, which is another tool or technique. It is a state of mind that makes sure our mind remains focused on an internal object that we have chosen. With the tools of analytical wisdom and mindfulness, we will be able to make our practice worthwhile and achieve a real substantial benefit from our practice.

Having understood the disadvantages of a distracted mind and how the distracted mind comes about because of our familiarity with the distractions, one can then understand the real purpose of meditation, which is to reverse the influence of the distractions and to familiarise ourselves more and more with a mind that is focused inwardly. Then as a result of focusing inwardly, the mind becomes more settled, calmer and clearer. Achieving a clearer, more settled and focused mind is the practical benefit of practicing meditation. Put very simply, meditation is the practice of familiarising our mind with being in a positive frame and achieving all the good qualities. That process of familiarising the mind in a positive way is the practice of meditation.

When we can understand the practical benefits of meditation, the natural inclination to try to practice meditation will come about. As we see the benefits of meditation we also need to be careful not to expect quick results. That would be unrealistic. Our mind has been familiar with the distractions for a long time. To try to reverse that situation and achieve a calm, subdued, peaceful and focused state of mind right away is unrealistic. We need to give ourselves time to experience the effects slowly.

In fact, if we take a slow approach to the practice of meditation such as short durations at the beginning and consistency, then because of that short duration we will experience some joy from the practice of meditation. That

will help to maintain our practice and make it steady and consistent. Otherwise, if we try to rush into the practice of meditation and expect quick results, it is very easy for us to give up very quickly when we don't see an immediate, dramatic change. If we don't see a quick result we might want to just give up. It is much more realistic and practical to take the approach of doing the practice very slowly, taking it step-by-step and to always remind oneself that the results of meditation will not come about quickly. It is a slow process. The slow process is natural, so when one gradually and slowly sees some progress, that is a *good* sign! That means that we are actually gaining a stable, sound basis from our practice.

As mentioned previously, analytical wisdom is something that we really need to pay attention to. Analytical wisdom is the intelligence that checks out whether our mind is being distracted or not, whether it *is* being influenced by the delusions or not. This intelligence is something that we already have within ourselves. It is a matter of focusing our intelligence in a particular way and using it to check the attitude or state of our mind. Is our mind in an agitated state or not? Is it feeling jealous or not? If we don't use our wisdom or intelligence to try to notice these things, we might not be aware of them. We might not be aware that we are angry when we are actually angry. We may not be aware that we are feeling jealous or proud or have attachment, when actually we are in those negative states of mind.

If we don't use our intelligence to look within ourselves we may not notice those states of mind occurring. When we don't notice the delusions in our mind, the damage is much greater. The stronger that we are under the influence of the distractions, the more damage they will do. Using our intelligence to check whether we are angry or not and noticing that we are angry, does not mean our anger will suddenly dissipate and disappear. But there is definitely a difference. We will notice that at times when we have not been aware, and have not used our intelligence or insight to check whether we are angry or not, and have just allowed ourselves to be in whatever situation we were in, the strength or energy of anger remains for much longer, and the mind becomes much heavier and the agitation is much greater. Whereas once we use our intelligence and notice when we are angry, the strength of that anger naturally reduces. We would notice for ourselves that we are not as strongly influenced by anger, and we have some measure and way to restrain ourselves when we have been diligent. The restraint comes once we use our intelligence and notice that we are in that negative state.

Similarly, if we are swayed by the delusion of jealousy, then the pangs or that uncomfortable feeling of jealousy just increase in our mind. We are never joyful with others' success. Whereas if we use our intelligence to look into ourselves and notice when we are jealous, it reduces the intensity of jealousy. It is the same with pride or excessive attachment. Thus, by developing our intelligence further we become more and more aware and will have that natural insight within ourselves to notice the delusions when they arise. Noticing them and knowing the disadvantages of those delusions will

eventually decrease the strength or energy of those delusions.

When we start to become the opposite of a short-tempered person, a person who is naturally more patient, we will become a person who will be appreciated and liked by all. Similarly, we can become a person without strong attachment, a person without much jealousy - who is joyful in others' good fortune, a person without much pride. In the practice of developing that intelligence, we will naturally and spontaneously develop those qualities to become a subdued and calm person. That is definitely a desirable goal for us.

The analytical intelligence or wisdom that we gradually develop from our practice is something that we will be able to retain and thus will assist us in every situation wherever we go. On a practical level, analytical intelligence or wisdom will help us deal with our everyday life. When we lack, or when we don't use our analytical intelligence in an effective way to really check our attitudes and states of our mind, then because we are more familiar with being influenced by the delusions, our natural response when someone agitates us or criticises us, will be to immediately get angry in response. We would not think twice. Normally when someone criticises and hurts us, if we don't respond to them, if we don't retaliate we will feel that we have lost. On the other hand when we are able to retaliate, we feel good, 'Ah ha! I've got them back.' We feel that it serves them right for us to retaliate with agitation and anger, but in fact that only escalates the situation and even though we may have some initial gratification, it leads to more disturbance and agitation in our mind. That sort of response would arise from a state where we are not using our analytical intelligence in an effective way. Whereas if we use our analytical intelligence in an effective way, combined with the practice of meditation, the positive result would be that our mind becomes naturally more subdued. Because our awareness is in a heightened state, we will have a different kind of response.

A person who has practiced meditation, who has practiced maintaining that analytical intelligence and wisdom within oneself at all times, would see it as a loss to respond or retaliate with anger when someone criticises and hurts them, not the other way around. It would be a loss to respond or retaliate with anger. There is a difference in attitude or approach. The response of anger would be seen as a loss, because that does not solve the real problem. One ends up getting more agitated, which leads to more complications in the long run. So to retaliate with anger would be a loss for oneself.

It is similar with the other delusions such as attachment and pride and so forth. When we respond with these delusions in our mind, it only escalates the discomfort or problems for oneself. When we practice using our analytical intelligence, we develop a certain awareness or mindfulness which we can maintain in every situation. That would be the real practice. When we go out and meet people who we normally associate with, someone who may normally trigger emotions such as anger or attachment, instead of responding with anger as we normally do we would actually be able to respond with

patience. That very same object becomes an object for our practice of patience, rather than making us feel agitated.

In that sense the ultimate goal is not in trying to become completely isolated and to avoid everyone. That's not the ultimate goal of meditation and that would not even be practical for us. Many people have that doubt. Meditation sounds very good and very nice, but if it means sitting rigidly in the corner of a room by oneself and focusing on something all day long, 'how am I going to eat? How am I going to be able to go out and shop and work? How am I going to take care of my kids?' That doubt definitely arises.

If one comes to that conclusion when we emphasise the importance of the practice of meditation, it is practically a wrong conclusion. Formally sitting and maintaining one's focus inward in a particular meditative posture is only a tool to be able to deal with the outside situations. To maintain focus inwardly in a meditative posture is relatively easy. To go out and face the world without getting agitated is not easy. However practicing sitting down, meditating, closing our eyes and trying to be focused is a means and a way to assist us, a preparation to deal with the outside world when we go out and meet the objects that initially triggered emotions such as anger, attachment, jealousy and so forth. Through practice and maintaining that intelligence in our mind, when we go out and meet the same objects, rather than triggering emotions such as anger, attachment, jealousy or pride, it actually triggers positive emotions. Coming into contact with the objects becomes an opportunity for practicing more patience, non-attachment and so forth. One sees an object and tries to refrain from strong attachments, jealousy and pride and so forth. In this way we can see that the practice of meditation is not a means of restricting us from dealing with the outside world, but rather equipping us with more tools for dealing effectively with the outside world.

One must also understand that the ultimate goal of the practice of meditation is to develop true love and compassion within one's heart, developing a kinder mind with concern for others. Developing love and compassion does not require sitting down rigidly somewhere, focusing on one particular object. Love and compassion come about by developing that attitude within oneself. Once one develops the attitudes of love and compassion, the more we interact with others the more likely that love and compassion can develop in our mind. When we go out we see many situations where people, animals and other beings are in a state of suffering. If we were just sitting in a room in a corner, it would be hard for us to imagine all of this. Sometimes going out and seeing people with difficulties helps us to develop stronger love and compassion.

There are differences between the practice of meditation techniques for developing love and compassion and the meditation techniques for other objects such as impermanence, the transitory nature of things, emptiness and so forth. You develop the meditation technique for these objects by focusing on that particular object itself. Love and compassion is something that is developed as an attitude or a state of mind within oneself. There is a

difference between meditation on love and compassion and meditating on objects such as impermanence.

So far I have been attempting to share some of the practical aspects of the practice of meditation with the intention that it will benefit you. The whole purpose of the practice of meditation is to be able to develop that intelligence and use it effectively for our benefit. Recognising that the analytical intelligence we have within us is a main tool that we have access to throughout the day, is something that is very important for us. In fact it is crucial for us.

As mentioned previously, it is not practical for us to be sitting in meditation all day long. We have to interact with others and deal with outside situations. When we practice meditation we need to remind ourselves of the attitudes that we need to cultivate and further develop, and the attitudes that we need to avoid. If we don't know the difference between the positive attitudes that we need to cultivate and the attitudes that we need to avoid, we will most likely be swayed and influenced by the attitudes that we are more familiar with, and unfortunately these are the negative ones. Thus it would be very hard for us to prevent ourselves from going down in a spiral of facing difficulties, problems, anxieties, stress and so forth. Being aware of one's own capacity, one's own intelligence and the wisdom within one's own mind, then using that in a practical way becomes most beneficial for oneself. Then when we do formal practice, it becomes more meaningful and more useful.

Having explained the technique or tools for the practice of meditation, we can now actually spend some time in formal meditation. In the earlier introduction we started off by explaining how the mind focusing on external distractions becomes the cause for all the problems, anxiety and so forth, within ourselves. That has been explained and we can recognise that. So now, for the duration of the formal practice of meditation, it is important that we try to completely withdraw our mind from these distractions. This means that we purposely don't allow our mind to be swayed or influenced by the fleeting thoughts and distractions that arise in our mind. Instead, we give our full attention to maintaining our focus on our breath.

First of all we spend a few moments just to try to withdraw our mind from the distractions. When thoughts and ideas arise, don't hold on to them and just let them pass by. Just bring the mind inward and let the mind settle down. Once the mind settles down, use your breath as an object of focus. Just try to focus on your natural breathing process. When we breathe in naturally, preferably through our nostrils, we follow the breath going in and when we breathe out naturally, we keep the mind focused on the breath coming out. Just try to maintain your focus on the breath itself, the natural inflow and outflow of your breathing.

If we notice our mind becoming distracted by a certain thought, idea or sound or any distraction, then just bring the focus and attention back to the breath. Once we gain some stability of focus on our breath, try to maintain that stability for a few moments. In that way we train our mind. We will do that for the next few moments.

Pause for meditation

That should be sufficient for now. With even the short duration that we spent for meditation we find that we get a natural benefit of the mind becoming calmer and more settled. Even though it's temporary, we do experience some measure of calmness. That goes to show that calmness is a natural quality of our mind. Our mind has the capacity and the ability, if we allow ourselves to experience a calm and peaceful state. This is something that we can experience as a result for ourselves. I think that we would all agree that even with that short duration we become more joyful and happy, a naturally elated feeling.

That naturally elated, joyous feeling we have within ourselves will have positive consequences for those around us as well. If one is in a joyful state of mind then that will naturally make us interact with those around us in a joyful way too, whether they are our partner, our friends or our children. So we can see that meditation not only benefits us by giving us a more joyful and happy mind, but it also serves the purpose of helping those around us as we interact with them in a more positive and joyful way. That then is the benefit for others as well. As we get the benefit, we share that benefit with others and they get that positive effect as well. In this way we can see the mutual benefit.

If we go home joyful and happy after a meditation session, our partner will definitely support us. They will say, 'that is very good, please go to meditation more often.' Our children will also be happy. They will say, 'mum or dad, go do some more meditation.' Instead of being against what we do, they will be completely supportive because they get the natural benefit as well.

I think that we have run out of time so we don't have time for questions tonight. However, I would just like to finish on the note that the whole attempt in trying to practice meditation and so forth is to gain a kinder and gentler mind, a more compassionate, loving and caring mind. That is the most essential quality that we need to develop. That quality seems to be practically beneficial to those with whom we relate and associate in our lives. It is something really very beneficial.

Before we conclude for the evening we will again spend a few moments in contemplation. This time while the name mantra of the Buddha Shakyamuni is recited, we put our full attention on the sound of the mantra and try to maintain our focus on that.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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