
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual it would be good to spend some time for meditation. So for that purpose we shall sit in an upright and relaxed position.

Adopting an upright position for meditation has a particular significance, which is sitting upright and making sure that one's back and spine are straight, which allows the channels within our body to be straightened out. When the channels are straightened, that allows the wind element, or the subtle wind energy, to easily flow throughout our body. When the wind element or energy is able to flow easily within our body, then it allows the mind to become more focused on our meditation.

There is a very close relationship between the mind and the subtle wind energy within our body. When there is no obstruction for the wind energy, then naturally the mind becomes clear and fresh. We can use the analogy of a water pipe to illustrate how the wind flows within the channels. We all know that if a water pipe is twisted or bent too much, it will obstruct the water from flowing freely in the pipe. Similarly, if we sit hunched and our body is not straight, it will obstruct the wind energy from flowing well within the channels of our body.

There are many other significant reasons that are explained in detail, but we will not go into that right now. However one thing that is good to take note of is that adopting the upright posture of meditation can, on a practical level, help prevent drowsiness and sleep from occurring during our meditation.

Just as it is important to adopt the right physical posture, we also need to pay attention to having the proper 'mind set' for the practice of meditation. Having adopted the right techniques of the physical posture and state of mind, it is good to recall the main purpose of the practice of meditation. Why do we choose to meditate? The main purpose of meditation, as explained in the Buddha's teachings, can be summarised into this point: Meditation is done in order to gain control over our own mind - to gain a subdued mind. The Buddha says, 'A subdued mind is a happy mind'. Conversely, an unsubdued mind is a disturbed, agitated and unhappy mind.

The main purpose of meditation, therefore, is to subdue the mind, and to do that we have to first train our mind to be under our own control. Right now it is as if we have no control over our own mind, and thus it goes off in every direction. However by bringing the mind into focus in the practice of meditation we are able to control the mind and make it serviceable, so that we can use it for the purpose of generating positive attitudes.

One may wonder why the mind has to be controlled? If it is not under our own control now, then who or what is controlling our mind? What happens when we don't have

control over our mind? These are reasonable questions to ponder.

The teachings answer these questions by explaining that if we leave our mind to follow its own course then it is most likely that it will be under control of the deluded distractions, which basically means that the mind is completely submissive to sensual gratifications and pleasures, and is completely immersed in and distracted by delusions. Thus, for as long as the mind is under the control of deluded distractions, it will be unsettled, and full of worries and problems.

Therefore the actual technique of meditation involves first of all withdrawing the mind from the deluded distractions, and then bringing the mind to focus inward i.e. to keep our mind centred. But without an object to focus on, it would be very hard to centre the mind.

Thus the technique introduces an object to focus on—a particular object that does not cause delusions and distractions to arise in the mind. This object is either a neutral object or a positive object, neither of which will cause delusions to arise. In the first step of the practice in our meditation, we recognise that the mind is normally under the sway of the delusions. Then we will come to realise that for as long as the mind is under the domain of delusions, there will be no real lasting peace or happiness. Thus we make the attempt to withdraw our mind from the delusions, and centre it in a state of absence of delusions. In order to keep the mind in that centred state, one initially chooses a neutral object to focus on, in particular an object that does not allow the delusions to arise. Then we maintain our focus on that object, and for as long as we remain focused on that chosen object of meditation, our mind is settled and tranquil.

Having presented the proper technique of meditation, one can now engage in the practice of meditation by withdrawing the mind from the deluded distractions, and keeping it focussed on our chosen object of meditation, which is the breath. The unique feature of the meditation object is, as mentioned previously, that it does not contribute to disturbing thoughts or delusions arising in the mind. That's why we choose the breath as our particular object here.

Having chosen that right object to focus on, the teachings on the practice of meditation emphasise that one must continuously and repeatedly focus on the object. That is emphasised so that we become familiar and accustomed to focusing on an object that does not contribute to delusions arising in the mind. The more we become familiar with focusing on that neutral or positive object, the less the opportunity for the delusions to arise. So the mind becomes free from the delusions and distractions.

We can see that as we become more and more familiar with, and more accustomed to focusing on the object, our mind naturally becomes more distant from the delusions. As the teachings mention, the results of the practice of meditation are that delusions lessen, so that our mind becomes a subdued mind. Initially, when we begin the practice meditation, of course we cannot expect to get a quick result, where the delusions simply fade away never to arise in our mind again.

Here one must understand that 'delusions' include disturbing thoughts, or negative emotions. Initially it might be difficult to completely subdue the mind with the practice of meditation, but through prolonged, continuous effort and prolonged meditation we will begin to notice that the

delusions lessen, and that the negative thoughts in our mind actually begin to decrease. In particular, we will notice that even though negative thoughts still arise, the intensity of the negative mind is not there any more. Their intensity becomes weaker, and we will not act upon them. That is what we would definitely call a positive result of the practice of meditation.

Further practice of meditation will then eventually subdue the mind. There are two important tools to maintain our practice of meditation: mindfulness and introspection. In the actual practice of meditation, mindfulness means to always be mindful of our focus on the object, making sure that our mind is not focusing on a distraction, but rather on the chosen object. That is the job of the tool called mindfulness, which is a mental state.

Introspection is a state of mind that checks whether the mind has become distracted or not; as soon as one notices that the mind has become distracted, it brings the mind back to focus on the object.

Just as mindfulness and introspection are important in the practice of meditation, we are encouraged to try to maintain that mindfulness or awareness, and introspection in our everyday life. It works in this way: when we engage in and interact with the outside world and we begin to notice delusions arising, then we warn ourselves and try to withdraw from that negative state of mind. That is how we use introspection in our daily life. We must always check our mind to see whether delusions are arising, and when we notice that the delusions have arisen then we withdraw ourselves from that negative state of mind, before the intensity takes place.

If having attempted the practice of meditation for some time you become discouraged because you don't seem to experience any benefit or result, then you should remind yourself of the main characteristics of the mind. One characteristic or nature of the mind is that it has a natural tendency to settle on whatever it is most familiar with. Thus if we are not able to focus well on an object of meditation now, that is due to the lack of familiarity with a focused mind, whilst we have much more familiarity with the distractions. In due course, we will exchange the distractions with familiarity with the object of meditation. Once we become more and more familiar with the object of meditation, our mind will naturally be able to settle on that, and become free from distractions and delusions. So it is good to remind ourselves of that characteristic of the mind.

Becoming attuned with the object of familiarity is a characteristic of the mind, which is actually a quality of the mind. It is the unique quality of the mind, to adopt the objects that it is most familiar with. The reason why familiarity is a quality is because in the practice of meditation we are attempting to acquaint our mind with a positive object. Due to familiarity with the object of meditation, the mind becomes more subdued and settled; then when we further train the mind to become accustomed with positive states of mind, like a loving kindness, that is what we will become accustomed to—a natural kind attitude towards others. That is possible because the natural characteristic of the mind is that it adopts whatever it is most familiar with.

We can relate that quality and characteristic of the mind to our own experience. That becomes an affirmation for ourselves from which we gain conviction in the benefit of meditation. With the small amount of experience gained

from the fact that when we train our mind in a positive way it becomes more positive, we see that it is a matter of putting some energy and effort into acquainting the mind with positive states of mind. We can gauge whether our mind has become positive from our own experiences. Then we must encourage ourselves to further extend our practice. In that way it is good to encourage ourselves.

Having explained the main purpose and technique of the practice of meditation, we will now spend some time engaged in the practice. We will be spending the next few minutes in the practice of meditation, so we have to identify the object that we are going to focus on, which is our own breath. First of all, we adopt the appropriate physical posture and then try to keep a fresh mind. Initially it is good to make a commitment to ourselves so that we actually get some result from the practice. It is good to make a commitment such as 'for the next few minutes, I will totally engage myself in the practice of meditation'. Then think, 'right now nothing is more important than focussing on my own breath'.

As mentioned previously, prior to actually keeping our focus on the breath, first of all we engage in voluntarily withdrawing our mind from all external distractions. These could be external sense objects such as sounds, sights and so forth, or internal thoughts, ideas and so forth. In short we completely withdraw our mind from anything that might be a distraction, and try to centre our mind within ourselves. Just try to bring the mind inward, as if we are cutting off from the external world; temporarily we just withdraw our mind from the outside world.

Just by the virtue of having withdrawn our mind, we might actually have the feeling of becoming settled. It is good to just remain for a moment or two on that feeling of being settled or centred within oneself. Once we have spent a few moments on feeling centred, then we move onto focusing on the object, which is the breath. The actual breathing should be neither laboured nor too shallow. Just try to find the natural rhythm of the breath, breathing in and out silently.

When we find a natural rhythm of our breath that is natural and calm, then we try to maintain our focus on the breath itself, just noticing the breath coming in through our nostrils, and leaving our nostrils. Try to maintain the focus there. It is said that we should try to have a very vivid recollection of the object, as if being totally engaged in the actual breathing process. The analogy that can be used here is, for example, to suddenly notice that we are hungry even while we are still working. When that happens, without any effort, we suddenly think about a meal. The thought of a meal becomes predominant and the picture of a meal is very vivid and strong in our mind. At that moment of hunger we are totally engaged in the thought of a nice warm meal somewhere.

Here, for the purpose of the practice of meditation, we intentionally occupy our mind with the focus on the breath. As mentioned previously, once we have settled our mind, and focused it on the breath, then we remind ourselves of the tool of mindfulness, which is to actually maintain our focus on the breath. When our mind starts to wander off, we immediately take notice of that and bring our focus back to the breath, which is the function of introspection.

This practice of focusing on the breath is a preliminary practice of developing a sound concentration on the object is called, 'unwavering concentration'. Mindfulness itself is not concentration, but a separate mental factor; however along with mindfulness there is a state of mind that is called

concentration. With the aid of mindfulness we will be able to develop our concentration, and the longer we are able to keep our focus on the object, the more acute our concentration becomes. That is the practice. Having explained all that in detail, we will now spend the next few minutes in a concentrated state. *(Pause for meditation)*

That should be sufficient for now. It would be good, to regularly put some time and effort into the practice of meditation just as we have attempted to do now. Don't leave it at 'it is good, but too difficult to keep up'. Try to make an effort.

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

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.1.1. Identifying the afflictions

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.1.2. The stages in which delusions arise

We have covered the identification of the delusions, which are categorised into ten different types. The text explains the definition of the delusions, and describes each one in detail. The next topic in the text is the order in which delusions arise.

There are two systems that explain the specific order of how the delusions arise. There is the Buddhist school that considers ignorance as being distinct from the view of the perishing aggregates. That view is a particular view of the lower schools such as the Mind Only School. Certain masters who belong to that Mind Only School present ignorance as being distinct from the view of the perishing aggregates, or the transitory collections.

The second approach is that of the higher Buddhist school that considers ignorance and the view of the perishing aggregates to be identical, i.e. to be one. When talking about ignorance, it refers to the view of the perishing aggregates and when referring to the view of the perishing aggregates it identifies ignorance. So this school considers them to be one. The higher school includes such great masters as Chandrakirti and so forth.

There are two different types of Mind Only views, those who follow the authority of the scripture and those who follow reasoning. It is those who follow the authority of scripture who identify ignorance and the perishing aggregates as being distinct. Their presentation of how the afflictions arise is that ignorance arises first and due to that the misapprehension of the aggregates, i.e. the self, arises.

Those who consider ignorance distinct from the view of the perishing aggregates use the analogy of a coiled rope in the twilight. Because of the dim light the status of the rope is unclear; someone may imagine that it is a snake. Similarly, according to this view, misapprehension arises due to the darkness of ignorance.

The coiled rope analogy seems quite feasible and logical to us because things are not very clear at twilight. If someone comes upon a coiled rope on the ground, then because of the darkness, they may mistake it for a snake. Even though in reality it is just a coiled rope, the misapprehension sees it to be a snake. Therefore in this instance, first ignorance of not knowing what the object actually is arises, and then due to that ignorance, the misapprehension of a snake is imputed

upon the rope. Of course, being great scholars of the Mind Only School, they use very good analogies and it seems feasible that there is ignorance of the object, which is the rope, and then due to that ignorance, the misapprehension that it is a snake arises.

As the text reads,

Similarly according to this view the misapprehension of the aggregates of the self arises due to the darkness of ignorance, which prevents clarity about how the aggregates exist.

For those scholars who consider ignorance and the view of the perishing aggregates as being identical, the view of the perishing aggregates is the root of afflictions. As mentioned previously, great Indian scholars such as Dharmakirti and Chandrakirti, and the Buddhist school asserted by these great masters, which is called the Prasangika-Madhyamika or Middle Way School, hold the view that the perishing aggregates are themselves the root of the afflictions, meaning that the view of the perishing aggregates is ignorance. So, for the Prasangika, ignorance, which is the root of afflictions, is the misapprehension that is the view of the perishing aggregates.

As the text continues to explain,

When the view of the perishing aggregates apprehends a self, discrimination arises between self and other. Once that distinction is made, you become attached to what is associated with your self and hostile towards that which pertains to others. Then, as you observe the self, your mind also becomes inflated.

So, as explained here in the text, when we actually investigate, analyse and scrutinise through our own intelligence, we come to notice how true these statements are in relation our apprehension of ourselves and others.

First of all, as explained here, the misconception that is called the view of the perishing aggregates focuses on oneself, grasping at a self-sufficient independent identity. It is specifically that attitude of ourselves as being the most important that leads to the main focus of being pre-occupied with just oneself. It is that misconception of a self-sufficient independent identity that produces a state of mind that grasps at the self. From that initial strong grasping at the self, the misapprehension carries further into a distinction between the self and the other arising. Here 'other' means one's friends or enemies. When others seem to contribute to the wellbeing of oneself, one develops attachment, while hostile feelings, which is basically anger, arise towards that which seems to oppose the wellbeing of oneself. That is how the further delusions of attachment and anger arise from the initial ignorance of grasping at the self.

If we were to actually scrutinise, and look into it, and try to identify our own experience, we will actually come to see the truth of the explanations in the text. As the text mentions, from the root cause of ignorance, which according to this system is identical to the misapprehension, or misconception, of the view of the perishing aggregates, arises a view, which is a strong grasping at the self.

When we look into it, we will come to notice that grasping, which in lay terms we can translate as 'self-importance', arises in our mind particularly when we have this very strong notion that 'This is my opinion, and it's a very important opinion. The only reason our opinion is important is because 'it's my opinion', there is no other real reason. We

put so much importance on the interests of the self, whether it is our opinions, wishes, or desires.

Here it is important to identify the 'I' that we hold as being so important. How do we perceive that 'I' or 'self'? When we say 'my interest, my opinions, my wishes' and so forth, that 'I' or self appears to us as being independently existent, or as inherently existent, existing independently in and of itself. The 'I' appears as being very solid, not depending on any other causes and conditions. However, as explained in the teachings, such an 'I', or self, does not actually exist.

So we are holding on to an 'I' that does not even exist. We must not misinterpret this to mean that the texts are suggesting that there is no 'I'. Of course there is a self or 'I', but the self or 'I' that we grasp at and hold onto is a false self or 'I', which appears as being independently or inherently existent. Because of that misconception, we have a strong grasping at an 'I' or self that is independently existent. So strong grasping arises and thus, as mentioned previously, the strong opinions in relation to the self arise.

Because of that very strong opinionated 'I', there is naturally a distinction between 'me' and others. The interests of others do not concern me, but attachment arises towards anything that contributes to my interest, while aversion arises towards anything that opposes my interest. As the teachings explain, the basic root delusion that leads to attachment and aversion arising is the main misconception that is identified as the view of the perishing aggregates. Do you get the picture?

It does become clearer when we see how all other delusions stem from that misconception that we have in relation to the self. As mentioned previously, the stronger that misconception is in relation to ourself, the stronger the misconception of the self, the more opinionated we become, and the more attached we become to our opinions. As we often see in society, the more strongly opinionated that people are, the stronger they hold onto their opinions.

Once there is this very strong grasping at oneself, and thus grasping at one's opinions, no one can change those opinions. One claims, 'Because it is my opinion, this is my decision' and no one seems to be able to oppose that. The reason is that if it's based on a misconception then it is a very strong opinion that one does not want to give up, because it is related to that very strong sense of grasping at the self. Then we can see how anger arises when there is opposition to one's opinions. Conversely, if there are favourable views about one's opinions, then attachment arises.

We can see from our own experience that when anger arises, our mind is neither settled nor peaceful. It is particularly noticeable that when strong anger arises in our mind, it's not a happy or peaceful mind. Strong grasping at the self ultimately produces anger, which is uncomfortable for us. Likewise, if one has very strong desires or attachments, then that also causes unrest in our mind, because one's desires are never satiated. So that too becomes very unsettling for the mind.

In this way we can see that the stronger the delusions that are in our mind, the more misery and suffering they cause us. That's why I regularly emphasise in my teachings that it is worthwhile to try to oppose the strong delusions such as anger and attachment. It is worthwhile that we try to learn about the antidotes to overcome anger and attachment, and try to apply them in our life. As mentioned previously, it may not be possible to overcome anger and attachment right away, but at least try to work towards reducing their intensity. That is something that we are capable of doing.

Even with our limited practice, and resources and experience, we can continually work towards that goal of reducing those delusions.

On a practical note, having studied the text means that where the Dharma introduces delusions and identifies them, then through our study and our own analysis and thinking about it, and seeing the disadvantages delusions such as anger and attachment, we can on a practical level try to reduce the intensity of those delusions when they arise. Basically we will be able to remind ourselves again and again of how to identify delusions. For example, when someone disagrees with you, or criticises you, then as soon as strong anger arises in the mind you can remind yourself, 'O.K., the emotion that I am feeling right now is anger, and it is a delusion'. Just being able to identify anger as a delusion, seems to defuse its intensity. Likewise with pride, as soon as one feels pompous and denigrates others, identify it, 'O.K., this is what is called the delusion of pride'. Identifying pride will actually defuse the intensity of that feeling. Likewise with attachment and so forth. As mentioned previously, at our level right now we may not be able to prevent the delusions from arising, but what we can do is identify them. You can try it out for yourselves.

An essential tool of meditation is mindfulness. Being able to recognise and identify anger as being anger is the function of mindfulness. When, for example, a delusion such as anger arises, we need to be mindful not only of the delusion itself, but also the disadvantages of that delusion. As presented in the teachings and from one's own experience, when anger arises identify it, 'O.K., this is the delusion anger; if I were to let it be, and act upon this delusion, there will be only disadvantage, and the outcome will only be harmful'. By thinking about all the disadvantages of anger and being mindful of that, we will be able to reduce the intensity of that delusion. That is how mindfulness plays a role, not only in meditation, but also in our everyday life.

There will be more detailed explanations further on in the teaching; today has been a basic introduction. If we follow these principles in our daily life it will really protect us.

Before we conclude for the evening, we can again spend a few moments in contemplation. This time as we sit in the appropriate posture and with the right mindset, we will 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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