
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual it would be good to spend some time in meditation. Initially it is important to sit in a comfortable and relaxed posture. Adopting a relaxed and comfortable posture is necessary, however we need to also pay attention to the state of our mind, otherwise it will not be conducive for the actual meditation. Just as we can control our physical posture, we can also control our mind, which is necessary for the practice of meditation. Lacking control over the states of our mind will lead us to encounter all kinds of troubles and problems. That is something that is quite obvious for us.

One will have noticed that one feels better when one's mind is relatively settled and feels calm. What we all strive for, whether consciously or unconsciously, is happiness, and we have the right to be happy. This is something we would all agree with.

We all wish for physical and mental well-being. In relation to mental well-being, we all strive to feel happy and joyful in our mind. Whatever effort we put in life, it is to achieve a result towards that end. Happiness is something that we are seeking, and to the best of our knowledge we are working towards that end.

Nevertheless, most of the time, what we experience is contrary to happiness. While we are attempting to pursue happiness, what we actually experience is that our mind becomes more and more troubled, and more and more anxious and stressed. Clearly, what we are doing doesn't seem to contribute towards bringing about the mental quietness that leads to happiness. Instead we find is that there are more times in which we experience anxiety and a troubled mind. Rather than contributing to our mental well-being, peace and happiness, what we usually engage in seems to destroy the happiness in our mind. Even what little happiness we may have obtained or experienced earlier may be lost in our very pursuit of gaining more happiness.

If one notices that this is the case for oneself, then at this point one can rightly ask, 'While I'm striving towards achieving well-being in order to make myself happy with whatever I do, such as work, study and so forth, I'm actually experiencing more troubles, more stress in my mind. Why is that so?'

As we investigate and sincerely look within ourselves to try and find the causes for this, we will begin to notice that the reason we experience a troubled mind is because in our very striving towards happiness, we are focussing outwardly on external objects as a means to bring about happiness and well-being for ourselves. We will find that our mind is mostly distracted with external objects.

One will notice oneself, that most of the time one's mind is focussed one hundred percent on external things. According to explanations in the teachings this distracted mind is the cause of a troubled mind and the rest of the unpleasant experiences. When we recognise this we will understand that if we were to reverse that situation to maintain a one hundred percent focus on an internal object instead of a one hundred percent focus on external objects, then we will experience the positive consequences.

We can compare the advantages and the disadvantages of these two states of mind: a mind which is completely focused outwardly and a mind which is hundred percent focussed inwardly. When one investigates in this way, one will come to experience for oneself that a mind that is one hundred percent focussed inwardly is a mind that is much calmer, much more relaxed and peaceful.

If, as a result of the practice of meditation, one can actually focus inwardly one hundred percent at all times and maintain that focus, then of course that would be an ideal outcome of the practice. However that might not be realistic or practical for beginners like us. What is practical and realistic however is not to allow our mind to be one hundred percent focussed on external objects at all times, but rather try to maintain some level of inward focus. As one gradually increases the inner focus within oneself, the consequence will naturally be a more settled, satisfied and content mind.

When we begin the process of focusing inwardly we will begin to notice that the more we maintain inner focus on a virtuous inner object, such as a virtuous state of mind, the more our mind will become joyful and happy.

In the process of the practice of meditation, the goal that we should be seeking is to slowly increase our focus on an inward virtuous object and decrease the intensity of our focus on external distractions. In that way we will begin to experience more and more joy and happiness in our mind, and gradually experience a more stable and contented mind.

If we remain in our present state with a mind that is completely, one hundred percent, focussed on external distractions, then our confused and disturbed state will only continue and become worse. Even if we were to remain in that state for a hundred years it would not, naturally, suddenly change to become more peaceful. That is the reality of how the mind works – that it adapts to whatever it is familiar with. When we begin to realise that, then we are able to encourage ourselves to further engage in the practice of meditation, by relating to its benefits.

We will begin to experience the positive consequences of a mere attempt of doing some formal practice of meditation, where we intentionally focus inwardly on a neutral or virtuous object. We will notice for ourselves that our mind becomes relatively calmer, more subdued and more settled, and thus we experience a joyful, happy state of mind because there is no trouble or anxiety.

We should use that experience as a gauge to try to maintain a virtuous state of mind even when one is not in a formal practice of meditation. The reality of our

situation is that we spend most of our time outside of formal practice of meditation, engaging and interacting with people, relationships, friends and so forth. As we spend so much time engaging in the outside world it is important for us to try to maintain, as much as possible, a virtuous state of mind, which is a mind that is imbued with kindness, understanding, tolerance and so forth. These positive states of mind will assist us to have a relatively joyful time with others.

This is possible if we firstly develop a state of mind that is called conscientiousness, which is a state of mind where we maintain a state of diligence or mindfulness within ourselves. Conscientiousness is combined with a diligence that is constantly checking or attitudes and state of mind and making sure that we don't fall victim to negative states of mind. If we maintain a conscientious mind, then we are more likely to be able to observe our thoughts and attitudes, and when we find that we have a negative state of mind, we are more capable of rectifying that. As we practise this when we interact with others outside of formal meditation in the outside world, it will in turn, enhance our meditation. When we actually engage in formal meditation it will become much easier. Otherwise trying to immediately go into a virtuous state of mind becomes very superficial.

In summary, what we need to attempt to do in our lives is that as we train in the formal practice of meditation, we must try to maintain that training outside of the formal practice as well, with the aid of conscientiousness and mindfulness. If we can maintain that virtuous state of mind in our interactions with others in the outside world such as relatives, friends, boyfriends or girlfriends, whoever you associate with, especially those that you feel close to, then because of our positive state of mind it will be a much more positive interaction. Our interaction with others, and the effects of that interaction, will become much more positive and thus, naturally, our lives will become much more meaningful and much more joyful.

A formal practice of meditation can actually assist one to maintain a virtuous state of mind outside of that formal practice, because of the natural consequences of engaging in a proper technique of meditation. One of the results of the practice of meditation is that it makes the mind serviceable. That is what we are attempting to achieve in the practice of meditation by familiarising our mind with a virtuous object.

When done properly, for as long as we engage in the practice of meditation, we are familiarising our mind with a virtuous frame of mind. When we make the mind serviceable it means we have more control over our mind. Thus outside of the practice of meditation, because of the familiarity and having made the mind serviceable, we can direct our mind to a virtuous state with positive thoughts. That is the result or the consequences of that practice of meditation.

Enabling one's mind to be serviceable is one of the benefits of the practice of meditation. There are further consequences or benefits of having been able to make the mind serviceable. The teachings give particular examples: for example, training one's mind in meditation to develop patience and compassion even towards one's enemies.

Generally, when we hear that phrase it seems unreasonable or unlikely. How could it be possible to develop patience or tolerance and compassion for an enemy? Generally, it doesn't seem something that is possible for ourselves to do, and that is because our mind is not familiar with that attitude. So it seems impractical or even impossible.

However, for someone who is engaged in the practice of meditation and particularly in developing patience and compassion, the more they become familiar with these positive states of mind, the more likely the mind develops those qualities, to the point that it becomes natural for the mind to feel patience and compassion, even towards one's enemy. As a result of having familiarised one's mind in formal meditation, it becomes more possible to actually practise that in the outside environment. Without any training it would seem impractical or even impossible.

We can also identify further benefits of the practice of meditation. We have mentioned developing patience and compassion. One of the negative, disturbing states of mind that actually hinders practitioners most of the time is a desirous state of mind; a mind with strong attachment is a mind that is a constantly distracted mind. That becomes a great obstacle. The advice given in the teachings is that the way to overcome the control or domination of attachment within one's mind is to engage in the practice of meditation of applying the antidote to attachment that, which is to focus on the faults of the object.

Attachment exaggerates the qualities of the object. As a direct antidote to this exaggerated state of mind, one begins to focus on the realistic faults of the object. Someone who actually engages in this practice consistently will, as a result of the practice of meditation, not feel the same level of attachment when they encounter the object of attachment again. The feeling of a strong sense of longing and desire to possess and grasp the object will not be as strong. There could even be a sense of distance or repulsion to the object. What was earlier an object of strong attachment now becomes an object of repulsion. That sort of practice can be developed as a consequence of training of the mind through the practice of meditation.

By relating these examples, I have attempted to describe some of the benefits of the practice of meditation. It is good for us to develop a genuine sense of appreciation for the practice of meditation by understanding these examples. When one develops a genuine sense of appreciation for the practice of meditation, it can encourage us to practise meditation ourselves. Even if we don't feel we are capable of practising meditation well, for whatever reasons, at least we develop a sense of appreciation of the effectiveness of the practice of meditation and develop an appreciation of others who actually engage in that practice. Rather than condemning practitioners of meditation, one will develop a state of mind of appreciation and even a wish to support them to further their practice. That sort of mind can develop when we begin to genuinely see the benefits of the practice.

The meditation technique that is an antidote to overcome lust is meditating on the unattractive features of the object. In investigating the reality of their body, one goes beyond the skin and the flesh and so forth and actually meditates on the skeletal aspect of the person. It is said that a meditator who uses this technique as an antidote to overcome lust, reaches a point in focusing on the skeletal aspect of the body where, when they look around, they would see the entire area as filled with skeletons. When we talk about the whole surrounding area being filled with skeletons that is not, of course, the factual reality. However that is what is perceived at that level of concentration, and that perception of the surrounding area being filled with skeletons is developed as a means to overcome lust.

For a practitioner who sees the whole world as being filled with skeletons, those skeletons are neither an object of attachment nor an object of lust. Thus this process has effectively overcome the attachment or lust within the meditator's mind. In that way one can see that concentration that is focusing on the entire surroundings as filled with skeletons, is a very effective antidote for overcoming lust. In this way we can see the benefit. This may be, of course, a little bit beyond our capacity right now, but nevertheless it is something that can be developed.

For concentration to become an active antidote for overcoming lust, it projects certain unattractive features on the object of attachment. Considering lust again, the other object of attachment is the person generating lust itself. We could begin with attachment to oneself. One can use one's own body as a means to overcome lust. One can consider how one's own body is infested with wounds and pus or imagine one sees the bones inside. In reality, of course, it is not the case that one's own body is in that state, but meditating in this way and focusing on one's own body and seeing it in that aspect becomes an effective means to overcome attachment and lust. These are meditation techniques that are used as effective antidotes for overcoming lust.

Initially that may seem to be an unrealistic sort of meditation. But, if one actually understands the technique that is explained in more detail in the teachings, then one will begin to understand how it works. When we talk about focusing on an object we must first understand that it is not the actual physical object that one is focusing on in meditation. It is an image of the object. Even when we use an external object as a focus of meditation, if we are attempting to see it just with our eyes and focus then that is not a way to gain concentration on that object. What one needs to do is focus on the mental image of the object and one develops concentration by focusing on the mental image.

In the earlier explanation of focusing on one's own body, one focussed on half of it oozing with pus and blood and so forth, and the other half as bared open with the bones visible. That of course is not actually happening to oneself right now. When one initially focuses on that mental image it will not appear clearly in one's mind, because one has not developed that image clearly in one's practice. But when one continually focuses on bringing

that image to mind, it becomes clearer and clearer. Familiarisation with seeing the image of one's own body in that condition actually influences the mind to overcome strong attachment to the body. The main point is that even a mental image, due to that effectiveness of focusing on it in that way, serves as an antidote to overcome attachment. To see its effectiveness it is important to understand how the practice is done and the manner in which it is done. It is an essential point to understand.

To emphasise the essential point again, (which is actually a very fine point that is clarified in higher levels of teachings that I am sharing with you now), when one attempts to meditate on an external object, some may use a stone or whatever object, but as Buddhists we can use a Buddha image, that external form of the Buddha image serves as referent object. Using that external image of the Buddha, one must then bring the mental image of the Buddha to mind, and that is what one actually focuses on and develops concentration. One can develop meditative concentration based on the mental image.

It is said that if one attempts to just focus on an external object, then it is very unlikely that one can develop meditative concentration, because as soon as we look at the object our mind can become distracted, as it is an external object. One's mind becomes distracted if one opens one's eyes and perceives an external object. It is mentioned in the teachings that concentration is not developed by focusing on the actual object. Thus to develop meditative concentration, one need to focus on the mental image. This might be hard for us to relate to now but it is explained in the teachings. One must bring this to mind and understand it to get the proper technique of meditation.

One can see from our own experience that when we use the mental image as a focal object it really helps the mind to become settled and more focussed. The more one focuses on the mental image the more it becomes steady because that is very stable in one's mind. The image becomes very stable and focusing on that image will help the mind maintain an acute focus, thus eventually developing into meditative concentration. That is the key point.

Furthermore, if one constantly relates to the object as a separate object, an object outside of your mind, then you perceive the subject and object as being completely separate, i.e. the duality of the subject and object. For as long as the appearance of subject and object as being distinct and separate remains, one has not really come to the actual point of the practice. So in one's meditation when one can reach the point where one's mind becomes one with the object, then the mind is able to remain very firm and stable. That is what one is trying to achieve in the practice of meditation.

When one reaches that level of concentration where the mind becomes one with the actual object, which is the mental image, then in that heightened state of concentration, it is said the sense perception becomes inactive. In that meditative state, sounds will not be heard. Even if the sound was audible, the meaning and so forth would not obstruct one's meditation. Thus sound

will not obstruct one's meditative state. Even feelings and smells will not affect one's meditative concentration. It is said that the meditator can remain very, very stable in that meditative state for a long duration. It is at that level that we can see the effectiveness of meditative concentration.

When one reaches that level of concentration one could be meditating anywhere, even in a crowd (*laughter*), and no matter what is happening around it will not disturb one's meditation. In our present situation we lack that sort of meditative concentration and it is easy for us to be disturbed when we are trying to meditate. Not only can external factors disturb our meditation but they might also actually bring up emotions of anger.

What I have related so far about the practice and the technique of meditation may seem to be a side track from our main subject, however I feel that this may be useful for you. Of course even though I do make attempts to practise meditation, I am in no way claiming that I have reached levels of stable meditative concentration. But being familiar with these explanations, I feel from my attempts to practise meditation that understanding these techniques is essential for those who are really interested in meditation. Thus, since I assume you are interested in meditation, I am attempting to share these specific instructions, which I feel maybe useful for you.

Of course, if in any way it may seem inappropriate or a sidetrack for you, then I have to apologise. Some may wonder why there is so much talk going on when we are attempting to meditate (*laughter*). Having understood the benefits and the techniques of the practice of meditation it would be good now to use some time to put them into practice.

As mentioned previously we adopt the correct physical posture and assess our mind. To engage in the practice of meditation we adopt the appropriate physical posture and we need to have the appropriate mindset, which is the intention to use our time to engage in a genuine practice of meditation. We must pay most attention to how we keep our mind. Therefore we intentionally withdraw our mind from all other thoughts and ideas and temporarily leave them aside and withdraw our mind from all distractions. As beginners, we need an object to focus on in order to do this. The object that we choose here is our own breath. We are focusing on the breath and it is important to focus on the natural rhythm of the breath. The breath should not be too laboured, nor breathing in too deeply or too shallowly.

We maintain a natural rhythm to our breathing and then focus on that. It is said that we focus one hundred percent on the breath, but in focusing on the breath the specific instruction is that we must not strain our mind too much on the focus. If we strain our mind too much, that would be a cause for excitement to arise in our mind. But we must not let the focus be too relaxed because that will be cause laxity to arise in the mind. In order to be free from the two main obstacles of meditation, which are excitement and laxity, one must try to adopt a focus that is not too strained and not too relaxed, preventing our mind from going from one extreme to the other. Try to achieve a good focus initially and then maintain it at that

level. Make sure you have a natural breathing rhythm and maintain a focus that is free from too much strain or being too relaxed. For the next few minutes we'll try to do that. (*Pause for meditation*).

That should be sufficient focus on the breath. Don't come out of your sitting posture, and maintain your physical posture in appropriate way and keep your mind distant from distractions, and we will now focus on reciting the Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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