
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual we can spend some time for meditation so that one can become a meditator or yogi! (*laughter*) To engage in meditation, first we sit in a comfortable, relaxed and upright position. It's also important to have a good motivation. If one has a good motivation, naturally one's external appearance also becomes pleasing. When one has a pleasing, friendly external appearance and conduct, that not only has a positive affect upon oneself, but also has a positive affect on others.

For whatever activity we engage in, having good behaviour is extremely important. With our mere appearance and conduct, we can actually inspire others and benefit them, making our actions worthwhile in the sense of helping others. So I advise you to adopt a good motivation; likewise from my side I will definitely also adopt a positive motivation. To instruct you to have a good motivation but then to neglect myself would be presumptuous, and not very proper.

If we take this into account in our present relationship, when I generate a good motivation, hopefully I will also manifest a friendly appearance, which will affect you in a positive way. When you likewise respond with a friendly appearance and good behaviour, then that would affect me in a positive way. So we can see that adopting a good motivation and having a good appearance does mutually benefit us right here now.

Some people have commented to me after having come to a teaching: 'I didn't really understand much of what you said, but you had a pleasing appearance and that really helped to calm my mind (*laughter*). So having a friendly appearance does serve a purpose. In fact, in a practical sense, I consider that making others happy is really quite important. When I notice others engaging in activities to please others and make them happy, I feel an affinity with such people.

Coming back to the main point in relation to the practice of meditation, when we adopt a relaxed and comfortable posture, if our mind is not settled and calm, our relaxed posture won't really serve much purpose. But if we can have a calm and relaxed mind in addition to adopting a comfortable and relaxed physical posture, we will definitely benefit from that and have a happier life. However, we need to train ourselves to have a calm, relaxed and happy mind: it is not something that comes about naturally, but rather through the practice of training our mind.

As part of our practice, we should investigate why it is that even when one has a relaxed physical posture, one's mind is not calm and relaxed. Why is that so? What

contributes to one's mind not being relaxed and calm? It is worthwhile to investigate this. If we sincerely investigate, what we will discover is that the reason for the mind not being calm and relaxed is because there is something missing. If we didn't lack such a condition for the mind to be calm and relaxed, the mind would be naturally calm and relaxed.

Through my personal investigation, I've come to this conclusion, whether that rings true for you or not is for you to find out. What I have found is that what seems to contribute to our mental turmoil, tightness and confusion is having a strong sense of clinging to this life's concerns. That seems to be a contributing factor to disturbing the mind. Of course, this does not mean that we should completely neglect the concerns for this life and our welfare, but the main point here is that if were to completely become preoccupied with the concerns of this life, that clearly seems to bring a lot of problems in our mind.

So we need to refrain from being too preoccupied with the concerns of this life; in fact if we paid attention, we would find that most of our thoughts and ideas are concerns about this life's welfare. In the practice of meditation that we are attempting now, we completely withdraw the mind from all of these distractions and preoccupations, and keep it focused on a chosen object. If we do this, we will notice that the mind does actually calm down.

Regarding the object we focus on in meditation, it is essential to have a good understanding of the specific points mentioned in the teachings. First, the object to be focused on is referred to as an internal object: one must understand what that actually means.

In relation to the breath, even though initially we might focus on the actual breathing process, when we go further into the meditation technique of focusing on the breath, we are instructed to focus on an internalised image of our breath. There are specific instructions on how to regulate our breath, which are that we should maintain the natural rhythm of our breathing, rather than taking long inhalations and long exhalations. So we find the natural rhythm of our breathing, which is not forceful: one's breath is not audible when one inhales and exhales but is silent. Adopting a breathing rhythm where our inhalations and exhalations are not too long, but follow the natural rhythm of the breath. Then as we focus on the breath, we internalise it, generating a mental 'image' of the breath – that is ultimately what we focus on.

When we aim to develop a concentrated mind through meditation, we can choose any object on which to focus. However, whatever the object, it must be internalised. The great Indian master Asanga has explicitly mentioned in his treatises that even when the meditation object we choose is initially an external object, this is not the actual object one focuses on in meditation. The external object is more like a reference point. Having a clear image of the external object, one then creates a mental image of the object and focuses on that mental image. As one becomes more and more familiar with that mental image, one's mind begins to settle down. One has a profound

experience of the mind settling down and becoming calm when one meditates in the proper way.

We can relate this for an example to the meditation objects that serve as an antidote to overcome strong attachment and lust. For example, there is an instruction to focus on the image of the surrounding area being filled with skeletons. Clearly it is not as if the meditator believes that the surrounding area is really filled with skeletons, but rather the meditator produces a mental image of the surrounding area being filled with skeletons. Initially it may seem like a mental projection from the meditator's side, but it serves a great purpose, because by focusing on that object and thoroughly familiarising oneself with the object, it actually enables the mind to reduce attachment and thus the mind settles down and becomes calm. This specific meditation serves as an antidote to overcome the negative state of mind of lust.

Whatever object we choose, when it is internalised as a mental image, the mind actually settles down when it focuses on that internalised object and this has a profound affect on the mind.

That is what is meant by correctly identifying the object of meditation. We can see why this is something we need to understand well. Likewise, even when we find the right meditation technique, it is important that we don't have an expectation of being able to meditate well right away. Rather it is a matter of following the correct technique and taking it step by step, very slowly. Meditating for a just few months is not sufficient to achieve a focused concentration. Rather we need to spend some time every day for months and years on end, gradually developing our meditation practice. Because most of us have very busy lives, it is more practical to focus just for a short time, every day, and continue with that on a regular basis. That is how one will get the benefits of practising meditation.

When we train our mind using the proper techniques of meditation, the benefit we gain can be extremely effective, particularly at the most crucial time of need for maintaining a calm and focused mind, which is at the end of our lives. The benefit of meditation practice from our tradition, as mentioned previously, is that it should reduce our clinging to this life. When we familiarise our mind with the right technique, it will serve as a means to reduce our clinging to, and preoccupation with, the mere concerns of this life. When that has been reduced, there is no question that it will benefit us at the time of death, because the real difficulty that anyone faces at the time of death is not being able to part from the attachments to this life. A strong attachment to this life would be the biggest obstacle; the greatest difficulty for a dying person, is not being able to let go. So if we familiarise our mind now with the practices and proper techniques, as mentioned previously, it will definitely benefit us at the time of death.

Since we all have to experience death, if our meagre attempts now can actually assist us at this most crucial time of our life, wouldn't that be most wonderful!! I assert that meditation practice would be a great benefit to us at the time of death, because of accounts of actual experiences related to me about people who have passed

away smiling and very peacefully at the time of death. These accounts relate to people who had not been Buddhists for a long time.

In one particular case, the spouse of a dying person came to ask me what they could do for their dying partner. I advised that if it were possible, just to encourage them to try and maintain a mind that was focused inward and not too concerned by external circumstances: not worrying too much about the family or children. One should let them know that the children will be taken care of, so they should just keep focusing inward. Apparently they used the advice, and the indication of its effectiveness was that when the person actually died, they did so very peacefully, with a very happy mind.

If that was the very positive result for someone who hadn't had that much time in their life to practise Dharma and meditation, then there's no question about those of us who have the eagerness and desire to practise meditation adopting the proper techniques of meditation. There shouldn't be any doubt it will benefit us.

So in relation to the benefit of our meditation practice, if we can have a broader view and think that it will assist us later on at the most crucial time of our life, that would serve as a means to inspire us to engage in the practice.

Now we will actually do few minutes of meditation, focusing on our own breath. As mentioned previously, we first try to assume the natural rhythm of our breathing, neither too laboured and deep, nor too shallow. Another important point to keep in mind as beginners is that we need to completely withdraw our mind from the external distractions, and commit ourselves to focusing on the breath.

Once we place our focus on the breath, we try to maintain it to the best of our ability, to whatever extent we can, without exerting too much effort. If we try to constantly regulate our focus by trying to make it firmer or a bit relaxed, that intention itself would become a distraction for us as beginners. So when we initially focus on the object, in this case our breath, it is good to start in a moderate way, with a commitment just to focus on the natural rhythm of the breathing, and not trying to regulate our focus too much. So, in this way we will maintain our focus on the breath for the next few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*)

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

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.1.3. The faults of delusions

In relation to the text, following from our earlier sessions, the topic we are covering is the faults of delusions.

As the text mentions, by seeing the faults of the delusions, one must regard them as an enemy. So we must train in developing this awareness or perception of the delusions

as being like an enemy. The teaching quotes from the *Ornament of the Mahayana Sutra*. As the sutra says:

Through afflictions, you destroy yourself, destroy other beings and destroy your ethical discipline.
After you have ruined your joy, you are shunned; your protectors and teachers rebuke you.
Disreputable, you will be reborn in a leisureless condition.
You suffer great anguish in losing the virtue you had or have yet to attain.

In relation to the first line 'through the delusions or afflictions you destroy yourself', when we relate to the disadvantage of the delusions, we can clearly see how they destroy us – they destroy the happiness of this life and our future lives, and bring us immense suffering instead.

If we relate to particular delusions such as anger, attachment or pride, these are clearly destructive when one is under their influence. As a result of harbouring these delusions within our mind, we only experience suffering and deprive ourselves of our happiness. That is just in relation to this life; there's no question that the delusions will also cause us suffering and deprive of us happiness in future lives.

In relation to the second line from the quote, '[afflictions] destroy other beings', it is clear that our afflictions such as anger immediately harm others. The harm our anger brings to others can be threefold: physical harm to their body, harm to their possessions, and mental or psychological harm that we cause by destroying others' virtues. We can clearly see how that happens like through afflictions such as anger, which is very obvious, and also through attachment and pride and so forth. These delusions or afflictions influence us to intentionally engage in activities that harm others physically, bringing pain to their body; or destroy their possessions; or destroy their virtues. Destroying others' virtues means that when one upsets another's mind and causes them to become upset and angry through one's negative actions, this is a cause for them to become upset, which destroys their virtuous mind.

In contrast to the afflictions, such as anger, that destroy oneself and others in a threefold way, we can adopt the antidote to oppose the state of mind of anger, which is love and compassion. We can see that when one has developed love and compassion, it in no way harms oneself or others. When you look specifically at the three ways of harming others, the mind of love and compassion does not harm others physically, it doesn't harm others' possessions, and doesn't harm their virtues. Having a compassionate mind cannot cause others to have a non-virtuous state of mind, but can only contribute to their having a virtuous state of mind. When we see that opposing the state of mind of anger by developing love and compassion is a great benefit for oneself and others, we can bring about that benefit. It is good to reaffirm to ourselves the benefits of developing these positive states of mind such as love and compassion.

In relation to the third line of the quote, that afflictions destroy your ethical discipline, clearly when the

afflictions are prevalent in the mind, this becomes the cause to destroy whatever ethical discipline one may have developed. Whatever moral code one may be inclined to abide by is destroyed due to the arising of the afflictions. If we take a particular example such as an ordained person, even though an ordained person would want to protect their discipline and abide by their ethical code, the mental afflictions would destroy or hinder that commitment.

The quote next says, 'after you've ruined your joy, you're shunned and your protectors and teachers rebuke you'. The first point mentioned here is that for the ordained person, the afflictions ruin one's joy. This relates to the joy of companionship: in the case of an ordained person, the joy of having the companionship of other spiritual brothers and sisters, or what we call the sangha in a literal sense, will be destroyed through the afflictions. The next point mentioned is that you are shunned. Again, this in relation to when one's ethical discipline has been harmed: when one destroys one's ethical discipline, one will lose the joy of companionship of other sangha and one will actually also be shunned by that community.

The text then says that your protectors will rebuke you. The protectors here refer to the protectors of the Dharma, who are normally there to assist you and protect you if you destroy your ethical discipline. So destroying your ethical discipline would be a cause for even the protectors to shun or rebuke you. Furthermore one would be in a state of disrepute in the eyes of others. And in future one would be reborn in a leisure-less state where one is deprived of good conditions and to practice the dharma.

So the main point from this quote is that one must by all means protect rather than destroy one's ethical discipline.

The last line from the quote reads: 'You suffer great anguish in losing the virtue you had or have yet to obtain'. This means that as a result of having destroyed one's ethical discipline, one loses the firm foundation needed to be able to accumulate virtue. As a result of destroying one's ethical discipline, the virtue one has already accumulated in the past will also decline. So when one reflects upon this, it should bring lot of anguish in one's mind.

In fact when we relate to times when we have lapsed in our practice of ethical discipline in any way, we might notice that later we started feeling strong regret in our mind. Actually that strong regret will help us develop the strong resolution to refrain from such lapses in future, which will help us to rectify those things.

In the text, the next quote is from Shantideva's text called *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, which we can leave for our next session. Meanwhile it is good to try to relate the points we have studied so far to our daily life.

We have covered the definition of particular delusions such as anger, attachment and pride. We have also covered the causes for these delusions to arise in our mind, and the disadvantages and faults of these delusions. It is good to reflect on these points and try to relate them to our own life, seeing that because the delusions or afflictions are not conducive for oneself and

others, one must try to put every effort into overcoming them.

We can clearly see the disadvantages of anger, for example. Some people have complained to me that their partner or friend is very angry, saying: 'It's hard to deal with my partner or friend because they are very angry'. My advice to them - if I know them well is: 'Have you taken the time to check whether you are angry as well or not? Wouldn't it be worthwhile perhaps to first check whether you have those states of mind yourself?' If after analysing yourself, you find you don't have any anger at all, then it might be reasonable to complain about your partner or friend. But it is good to actually begin by analysing yourself; rather than always pointing the finger at and complaining about someone else, begin with yourself. That is a manageable action for you: to analyse, check and deal with your own state of mind.

There is a practical benefit to first doing a self-analysis and checking whether one has those delusions, such as anger, or not. If one is able to identify them within oneself, then further analyse what the faults and causes for the delusion to arise are. One can clearly identify whether they are really a part of oneself or not. When one begins to recognise that the delusions are very negative and harmful but that one does not seem to have much control over them, one will also begin to realize that they are not really one with oneself. They are a state of mind but they are not really who one is; rather they are a negative state of mind that influences one to behave in negative ways. So if we can actually clearly identify that, the practical benefit of our self-investigation is that we can actually help ourselves to understand others.

When others appear to be angry, we can relate to them through our own self-analysis, and understand that it is not the person themselves who is at fault, but the delusions or afflictions in their mind that makes them say things and do things in that way. This is as explained in texts such as the Abidharma, where certain quotes clearly mention that it is not the person who is actually at fault but the delusions. When one can identify that in others, the benefit to us is that our anger or annoyance with that person will actually be reduced because we know they are affected by the delusions, a state of mind, rather than themselves being at fault.

So, through self-investigation and relating to others in that way, one is able to engage in the practice of developing patience with an enemy, and generate love and compassion rather than anger and hatred towards the enemy. It becomes possible because the enemy is actually nothing more than a person who is possessed, so to speak, by the delusions. Because they are afflicted by the delusions, it is as if they have no control over themselves; they are completely powerless under the influence of those delusions. What makes them an enemy in the first place, is the negativity one feels from them. But that very negativity is beyond their control, as they are really under the influence of delusions.

When one can understand that, there is no way one would feel angry towards them. In fact one would feel compassion towards them, seeing how they are dominated by anger. One actually feels compassion for

them rather than becoming angry and upset with them because they are being harmed by these afflictions. By feeling compassion for them, one has developed patience as well. So this is a very practical way of dealing with these difficult situations, and this is why it is worthwhile for us to pay attention to these practices.

Before we conclude the session for the evening, let us again adopt the appropriate, relaxed posture, and this time 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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