
The Condensed Lam Rim

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It would be good to spend some time in meditation. The literal translation of the Tibetan word *gom* means to familiarise oneself: here it means familiarising oneself with good thoughts, a good state of mind or good attitude. Through our own experience, we can verify that the more familiar our mind becomes with positive states, the more this contributes to the mind becoming more settled and restful.

What most of us lack, which is a real problem for us, is that whenever we find the right conditions to relax our bodies, we find that our mind is still quite agitated. We are not able to really relax our mind because we are not familiar with the practice of relaxing the mind.

We need to think about the benefits of a relaxed mind. First, when our mind is not relaxed, we feel a lot of agitation and disturbance; whereas when our mind is relaxed, this contributes to our sense of well-being. When we engage in an activity, whatever it may be, with a relaxed state of mind, that activity becomes meaningful. Even when we engage in a worldly activity such as going to work, if our mind is relaxed, the activities that we engage in may not seem as strenuous, and our relationships with co-workers and other work associates will be harmonious. Because one's mind is in a relaxed state, the environment around us also seems conducive and manageable. In fact, the kind of environment we experience externally is very much related to the state of our mind.

We may have noticed from our own experience that when we try to engage in virtuous, meaningful activities, it is very hard to settle down the mind. At such times, it may seem difficult to keep the mind settled and focused. In contrast, whenever we engage in meaningless activities – such as gratifying our sensual pleasures or engaging in activities that can harm one and others – our mind seems to spontaneously engage with that activity. There seems to be no hesitation and no thought of withdrawing from that impulse. It seems that we willingly and uncontrollably follow those activities, whereas with virtuous activities, it's the opposite – we don't seem to be able to settle down and do them willingly.

If you find this to be true for yourself, imagine what it would be like if you could reverse that situation, and naturally have a spontaneous inclination to engage in meaningful or virtuous activities – those that have a long-term benefit for yourself and others. If we could willingly and joyously engage in meaningful activities and naturally restrain ourselves from engaging in negative activities, wouldn't that be a good situation to be in? I

would think so, but I am not sure what you would think about this.

So why are we in this situation? A situation where we seem to be able to voluntarily and spontaneously engage in activities that harm ourselves and others, but find it difficult to engage in positive, meaningful activities? The answer is that we are naturally inclined to easily engage in whatever we are most familiar with.

If we look back at our situation in this life – without needing to go back to previous lifetimes, we can trace our acquaintance with non-virtue. We can see how much attention we have paid to non-virtuous activities from as far back as we can remember. So even in this life, we can see how much time and energy we have spent acquainting ourselves with meaningless, non-virtuous activities. In contrast, we have not spent much time doing virtuous activities; thus it is harder for us to naturally engage in virtue. With this in mind, we should spend some time and energy in acquainting ourselves with virtuous activities that are useful and beneficial for us and for others.

At this point in our investigation, we must be careful not to feel overwhelmed by the reality that because we are more familiar with non-virtue than virtue, that there is nothing we can do about it. That would be a wrong conclusion.

Rather we should resolve that, if our mind is dominated by non-virtue through the influence of familiarity, then if we were to choose the right actions to become familiar with, naturally our mind would become more familiar with that as well. If we were to familiarise ourselves with positive actions now, naturally our mind would become more and more familiar with them. So while it may be true that one's mind has the fault of being acquainted with negativity now, at the same time it is also a reality that our mind has the potential to become more familiar with positive attitudes. Because of that factor, we can change our situation.

When we reflect upon our past and present states of mind and identify actions that were non-virtuous or harmful, the moment we think about those activities, we will have a feeling of regret about those improper actions. In one sense this is positive, because it will encourage us to transform ourselves and engage in more positive activities.

But if we become too preoccupied with our previous lifestyle and negative deeds, our mind may become obsessed with how negative we were in the past, how bad a person we were. This can lead to a depressed state of mind, of feeling hopeless and that we cannot really do much. Whenever we remember our previous deeds, it weighs us down, and that depressed and heavy state of mind can obstruct us from moving forward. Thus we must be careful not to dwell on our past mistakes and not be completely obsessed with feeling bad about those situations.

Nevertheless, whenever we think about those negative deeds, there is never a moment that we can rejoice or feel happy about them. This proves that those deeds or thoughts were not conducive; when we think about them

now, it does not bring us any joy. In contrast, when we think about the positive things we have done in the past, this can bring us joy. It can encourage us to feel that we have led a life of trying to do good for others, being virtuous. So whenever we think about the positive things we have done, it can encourage us to further engage in positive deeds. At the same time, as we said earlier, we should not overwhelm ourselves with remorse about negative deeds.

Our resolve to engage in positive deeds and have good attitudes because they are conducive to our well-being can encourage us to engage in the practice of meditation. The more we become familiar with meditation practice, the more the negative feelings about past negative deeds will reduce. As we begin to see ourselves in a more positive light, the resolve to engage in virtue will become stronger in our mind. In that way the practice of meditation can help to stabilise our mind and affirm our ability to lead a more virtuous life.

Leading a virtuous life simply means engaging in normal actions of body and speech that are favourable to others: for example, speaking to others in a nice manner, trying to show good facial expressions, and being courteous to them. Even small such acts are definitely appreciated by others. When we are genuinely able to speak with kind words and use good physical gestures in dealing with others, naturally people will speak highly of us. And when we hear others speaking highly of us, it can further encourage us to do better.

We may wonder here why it is so important that others speak highly of us. We can relate this to our own experience. If we hear the slightest critical word said against us, it really brings us down. We feel hurt and upset and we do not easily tolerate that slight criticism, let alone hearing that we have come into complete disrepute. If it is clear that we do not like even the slightest criticism of ourselves, we need to protect ourselves from having a bad reputation and so forth. On the other hand, even the slightest praise from someone lightens us up. So if we react so strongly to even the slightest praise and slightest criticism over a short time, our overall reputation seems to be quite important for our well-being. And a good reputation is obtained when one genuinely engages in positive gestures and deeds in relation to others.

Anyone who is able to interact in a positive way with others is definitely appreciated wherever they may be. Such a person is regarded as an important person, someone worth having around, from the level of personal relationships to the level of the community and society. A good person is always a welcome person, a person who is appreciated. We often hear comments that such-and-such a person is a joyful person, always smiling, jovial, getting along with everyone. Everyone seems to appreciate those traits. And when such a person is missing, everyone misses them and asks: 'Where could they be?'

Such a person is also always welcome at home. Their partners and children are eager to see them come home. When they go out into the community and deal with others, they bring joy and others enjoy their company. That sort of person is naturally a happy person

themselves; a happy person at home, a happy person when they go out. So if we can develop those qualities, it will contribute to us having a joyful and happy life. That is what I consider to be really important for a happy life. If we can familiarise ourselves with those kind of qualities in our own life, that would be worthwhile.

To summarise the main points, meditation means familiarising one's mind with positive attitudes. There are two states of mind we can become familiar with: negative or positive. If our mind is familiarised with negative attitudes, it brings unwanted circumstances for oneself and others. Whereas when we familiarise ourselves with positive attitudes, this brings about well-being for ourselves and others. In the practice of meditation, the main point is that we are attempting to familiarise our mind with positive attitudes.

Having explained the benefits of the practice of meditation, we can now spend a few minutes in meditation. What we are attempting to do is to withdraw our mind completely from its acquaintance with negative thoughts, which are the distractions. Then having identified the object we are focusing on, which in this case is our own breath, we bring our mind inward and place our focus upon the breath. We try to maintain a 100% focus on the breath itself. Then we'll spend the next few minutes just observing the natural inflow and outflow of our breath and place our attention on that.

During the meditation practice, if we notice that our mind strays and starts to acquaint itself with the distractions, it is important to remind ourselves to again withdraw our mind, and really try to bring it back to the focus on the breath. *[Pause for meditation]*

That should be sufficient for now. Does anyone have a question? You may raise your hands if you do. There are no questions, so we'll continue the text where we left off.

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

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.2. The way one gathers karma

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.2.1. Identifying the karma that is gathered

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.2.1.1. Karma that is intention

As the text indicated in our last session, in identifying karma, there is a further classification into virtuous karma, non-virtuous karma and invariable karma.

The virtuous karma referred to here is contaminated virtuous karma – there being uncontaminated and contaminated virtuous karma, and within contaminated virtuous karma, there is contaminated virtuous karma accumulated by noble beings and that accumulated by ordinary beings. What is being referred to here is contaminated virtuous karma accumulated by an ordinary being.

In the classification of the three types of karma, there is also meritorious karma, non-meritorious karma and invariable karma. These are the more specific terms of the

classification. The terms non-meritorious karma and non-virtuous karma are synonymous.

Examples of non-meritorious or non-virtuous karma are negative actions such as killing another being. This is in relation to a being in a desire realm. Ordinary beings such as ourselves living in the desire realm can make the commitment not to engage in the act of killing by reflecting upon the harm that it has on the other: taking other's life, and causing tremendous harm to them. By reflecting on that and making a conscious commitment by taking a vow not to kill again, a being of the desire realm can accumulate virtuous or meritorious karma.

Invariable karma would be the virtuous karmas collected in the form and formless realms. More specifically, contaminated virtuous karma within the form and formless realms is what we call invariable karma.

Even within a conventional, worldly lifestyle when we think about the explanations of karma, we can relate to it as being really worthwhile and positive thing to consider. Non-virtuous karma relates to those actions that harm others, such as killing, taking what is not given (stealing), using harsh words, engaging in adultery or sexual misconduct, having harmful thoughts and covetousness. In an ordinary sense, taking life, stealing and so forth are considered immoral even by worldly people. Thus the action of refraining from such harmful activities is considered to be positive.

The advice to adopt the virtuous karmas and abandon the non-virtuous karmas basically means to be a good person, a non-violent person. If we reflect upon the significance of karma, the very basis of the Buddha's teachings, it is really based on what we call non-violence. That is how we can assert that the Buddha's teachings are based on non-violence.

Having identified meritorious, non-meritorious and invariable karma, one may now wonder why the karmas accumulated within the form and formless realms are called invariable. The effects of all karma created in the form and formless realms – the celestial god realms – will definitely ripen in those realms. Whereas the karma created in the desire realms, such as our human existence, is variable or fluctuating because it is not definite that the effect of that karma will be experienced in the desire realm itself. The effect could be experienced either in a higher realm, such as the form and formless realms, or even in the animal realm or other unfortunate realms. Therefore it is called variable or fluctuating karma.

The next category explained in the text is the actual manner of accumulating karma. So we can leave that for our next session.

Geshe-la is giving one more chance for any questions. If you do you have one, you can raise your hand quickly, otherwise we'll go into a meditation session. If there are no more questions, we will again spend the next few minutes in meditation. This time as we withdraw our mind from all internal and external distractions, we keep our attention or focus upon the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra.

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