
The Condensed Lam Rim

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18 February 2009

As usual it would be good to spend some time in meditation. As explained regularly here, the first thing that we pay attention to is our physical posture. We sit in a relaxed and comfortable physical posture for meditation. People will already know how to adopt the correct physical posture.

Having knowledge about something is, of course, important but it is more important to actually put that knowledge into practice. Often we might be in the situation of knowing quite a lot of things but hardly ever applying that knowledge. In fact, most of our faults are due to not applying our knowledge about positive actions, but rather allowing ourselves to be influenced by negative thoughts and ideas. If we consider this in relation to our daily lives, we might notice that due to a lack of diligence, we may not be appropriately applying our knowledge of positive actions, but rather engaging in negative ones. So it seems that whether we find ourselves in a good or bad situation depends on whether we engage in positive or negative activities.

If we look into the reality of our situation, we will notice that if we try to ensure all of our actions – physical, verbal and mental – are applied in a positive way, it will definitely contribute to our mental well-being and happiness. For example, whether a relationship between two people is joyful or not very much depends on the mutual actions they engage in. When those actions – such as facial expressions and words – are based on genuine concern, love and a wish for the other to be happy, they will naturally contribute to a harmonious, good relationship. But if genuine mutual concern is lacking, these two people will show unpleasant, rather than pleasant, facial expressions. Instead of having love and concern for each other, there would be a feeling of anger towards each other. Then the words they utter would be unpleasant, instead of pleasant. So the relationship would start to deteriorate and the gap between the two people would widen.

We all naturally long for good companionship and friendship. We can safely assume that ordinary beings cannot survive without friendship. No one can bear the idea of not having any companions or friends. If we look into the reason why we seek companionship, it is very much based on the idea of mutual care and concern. There is a natural expectation that friends will care for you. You assume that you will be nurtured by the other, and that you will be able to nurture and care for each other. This is especially so at times of difficulty: when either one is sick or when they reach old age, they assume that they will be able to look after each other. That natural expectation is there from both sides. Thus friendship is

based on the expectation of mutual care and benefit for each other.

When companionship is based on good attitudes and intentions from both sides, it will naturally be fruitful. Two such people will be good companions. Unfortunately that good attitude or intention does not come about spontaneously, without effort. It is very rare for that to happen. Rather we must put some effort to work at developing good attitudes. We have to constantly work on them, constantly develop them to become firmer and stronger within us.

Meditation is the technique we use to develop good attitudes in our mind. If we do not put effort into protecting our mind, we will have the fault of not maintaining a good attitude within ourselves. If we lack diligence in protecting the mind, the good intentions or good attitudes we may have initially can start to diminish or we will lose them altogether. For example, we may initially have concern for the other and have the intention to use pleasant speech, facial expressions and so forth. But if we are not diligent and fail to maintain and nurture that good intention, those good qualities within us will lapse. The good qualities and good intentions in our mind will start to weaken. Therefore, protecting the mind is one of the main tools for maintaining a positive attitude.

The practice of meditation is a technique where one intentionally withdraws one's mind completely from all distractions, negativities and conceptual thoughts. We then place our full attention and focus on a selected meditation object and familiarise our mind with that object. The technique of meditation enables us to develop and strengthen our diligence and awareness so that we can use these qualities as tools for protecting the mind.

We can see from our own experience that there are two main ways in which the mind can get agitated and disturbed. In the first situation, the mind is easily distracted, constantly thinking about many different things, and always wandering off in every direction. That level of distraction becomes a cause for the mind to become very unsettled, disturbed or agitated. In the second situation, the mind becomes disturbed and agitated when one focuses on a particular problem that one is constantly obsessed with. One continuously goes over and over the particular situation that one considers a problem; by thinking about it again and again, one augments the problem. One becomes obsessed with it and the mind becomes very withdrawn and negative.

So the mind can be disturbed either by being very distracted or by being obsessed with a certain situation that one has labelled as a problem. In either case, the best antidote is to allow the mind to become restful, less agitated, less disturbed through the technique of meditation. In both cases, meditation diverts the mind – which is either completely distracted or completely obsessed with a problem – focusing one's attention instead upon a neutral or positive object. When one familiarises the mind with focusing on that object, to that extent the mind will experience relief from agitation and disturbance. Thus we can definitely see the benefit of practising meditation. It is really worthwhile to look into

how the meditation technique works and the practical benefits you can experience as a result of that practice.

It is worthwhile for us to spend some time looking inward, at how our mind functions, and recognising the different states of mind. In doing so, we will become more aware of our mind and thus be able to gain more control over it. In fact when one does this self-analysis and investigation, it can be quite amusing. There are a lot of things to discover within one's own mind. One may not need to exert time and energy in going to the theatre! [*Geshe-la laughs*] Just looking at one's own mind can be quite amusing.

If we do that self-analysis, looking into the mind, we would begin to notice a lot of mental states and attitudes that we need to discard. We would also notice a lot of positive things that we may not have noticed before, which we need to nourish and cultivate further. That sort of awareness could definitely be developed with intelligence.

Thus it is really worthwhile to contemplate the various benefits that we gain from the practice of meditation. Then we would be able to clearly see what it is we need to do. There are certain things we need to discard and leave behind; and certain things we need to maintain and cultivate further. We leave behind the negative attitudes and so forth, and adopt and cultivate the positive states of mind, which serve as antidotes to the negative states of mind. So that which opposes the negative states of mind is those attitudes and so forth that we need to adopt.

To give specific examples, the state of mind we call attachment is something we need to leave behind or discard. The reason is because it harms us. Strong attachment does not contribute to our well-being but rather harms our peace of mind.

It might be hard for you to relate to this, and you might feel: 'It's not possible to overcome all attachment'; it may be hard for you to see the faults of attachment. But if we look at very strong attachment – a mind that is obsessed with an object– through one's own experience, one would have noticed that strong attachment leads to agitation and disturbance in the mind. We can clearly see that strong attachment disturbs our mind and is not conducive for our well-being, so it is an example of something to be discarded, to be left behind. The state of mind that opposes this is called non-attachment, which we need to further cultivate and develop. Thus after we begin discarding strong attachment, then work our way through to discarding subtler forms of attachment, the state of mind of non-attachment will start to become stronger in our mind.

It is the same with anger. We can definitely relate to the shortcomings of anger. So the state of mind of anger is to be discarded, and the opposite of anger – non-hatred, non-anger, a compassionate, loving state of mind – is to be cultivated. Likewise jealousy is another state of mind that can disturb us. So jealousy is to be discarded and the happy state of mind that rejoices in others' happiness is to be cultivated. Again it is the same with pride: being a state of mind that disturbs us and is not conducive to our well-being, it is to be discarded, and genuine humility is to be cultivated.

When we recognise the faults of these negative states of mind and the virtues of the opposite, the antidotes to these states of mind, then we cultivate these antidotes and use them to oppose the negative states of mind.

Having explained a bit about the practice of meditation and the various types of meditation, we will now adopt a technique that is described as one of the most effective for overcoming a very distracted mind. It is the technique of single-pointed concentration on an object such as the breath. The breath is a conducive object for the mind to focus on, enabling it to become calm and free from distractions. This technique is described as an especially useful one for beginners, who have the problem of a very distracted mind. We need to first try to overcome the grossly distracted mind so that we can start working at more subtle levels.

To engage in the proper technique of focusing on the breath, first we make the commitment that for the next few minutes, we will not allow my mind to be distracted by other thoughts or any kind of external object; we completely withdraw our mind and place our full attention on our breath. As described in the teachings, the manner of our breathing has to be regulated: it should not be a laboured or forceful and should be very quiet. The teachings advise that when the breath comes in and out of the nostrils, it should not cause the nostril hairs to move. That means our inhalation and exhalation should be very gentle. It would also be useful to try to keep track of one's breath: one round of inhalation and exhalation would count as one breath. Keeping track of one's breath is said to be useful to help us keep our attention on the breath. In this way, for the next few minutes, we will keep our attention and focus on the breath itself. [*Pause for meditation*] You can come out of your meditation now.

We have discussed the techniques and benefits of the practice of meditation quite extensively. The main point is to make the resolution: 'I want to experience a happy mind. Since I wish to have a happy mind and a sense of well-being, it is worthwhile for me to engage in meditation. That will help to bring about the benefits.'

Another main point raised earlier is the importance of protecting one's mind. This is really essential, not only for oneself but also in relation to others. If one does not pay attention to protecting one's mind, the slightest suggestion from another could trigger negative feelings or emotions within one. Thus, regardless of the other's attitude, one can be protected from harm if one protects one's own mind.

In terms of a relationship with someone else, if there is mutual concern – genuine love and compassion for each other – the relationship would not just be superficial but would be really nurturing and caring. Two such people would help each other not only in everyday life, but at times of real difficulty. As long as the element of real compassion and genuine love is there within both people, then that care and nurturing for each other will definitely be there.

As I regularly point out when explaining the need for cultivating love and compassion, there is a difference between love and compassion and just attachment. There is definitely a clear distinction. Particularly at this time,

with the recent bushfire tragedy in Victoria, the need for love and compassion becomes very clear. Love and compassion is what causes people, in tragedies like this, to spontaneously help and give aid to those in need. Attachment on the other hand is based on the thought: 'What can I get out of this? How does that person relate to me?' In such a situation, one may help the other only out of self-interest.

When there is love and compassion, regardless of who the others are – be they strangers or even people with whom one normally disagrees – in times of real need and when there is real distress, one will have the ability to extend help, to go beyond all boundaries and extend one's help. This is a clear sign of a compassionate motivation. If one's concern were just based on attachment, then that natural spontaneous wish to help will not arise for strangers. Thus it is very clear: at times of tragedy, that overwhelming expression of concern, of wanting to help, is real compassion.

We can see from the recent examples, people who have been going out of their way really trying to give help and aid to people, even making sure they go shopping on a day when they know the money will be donated to the victims. I heard from others, for example, that when Coles supermarket announced that its profits on a certain day were to be donated to the victims, there were more people shopping on that day than at Christmas! This shows that even a small act like shopping, knowing that it would help others, was done voluntarily out of good will, out of concern.

Then there are others who, even if it was only giving a cup of tea, did what they could to extend help to others: even if it was just donating small personal items. What this shows is that if we have genuine love and compassion our hearts, when others are in need of help and in distress, overwhelmingly our desire to help will come through.

This recent tragedy clearly shows, first of all, the great benefit and value of qualities such as love and compassion. Secondly, it shows the good values of the Australian people in general. As we have heard, all over Australia people were indiscriminately willing to help. This demonstrates that the general populace of Australia do have love and compassion in their hearts. As I regularly mention, we all have that seed of love and compassion, and it is a matter of really cultivating and further developing it. The recent bushfires were, in a way, a clear demonstration of how love and compassion is the best aid, the best friend, at times of difficulty. That, I feel, is a good point to consider and think about.

What I personally also felt was that, living in a country like Australia, I would not be deprived of food and I wouldn't die of starvation. There would always be some help. It seems that in terms of food and so forth, at times of difficulty, it is even more plentiful!

To summarise, the recent disasters here and the overwhelming concern that people have shown reminds us that, in times of difficulty or disaster, the real source of help that will allow people to benefit each other is that element of love and compassion. It is a really precious attitude. Reminding ourselves of the great benefit, great

value of love and compassion should inspire us to try to cultivate it further, to develop it to its greatest extent.

Not only humans but even animals can experience the benefits that result from the attitude of love and compassion. Even animals respond to someone who has a sense of love and compassion and a sense of concern – not just pets, but wild animals. A good example was during the recent fires, when the fire-fighter gave the koala water. A koala is considered a wild animal that doesn't normally come into contact with humans but rather shies away from them. However, at a time of difficulty and distress, when a person with genuine concern, wishing to help that animal, came close to it, we could see clearly that it had an expression on its face of really wanting to have that care, even putting its paw on the man's hand. That sort of closeness was shown to someone who was helping it. This clearly shows that the koala could feel the affection. So, even animals have the capacity to recognise someone who is extending help with genuine concern, love and compassion.

I've heard that this particular image of the fire-fighter giving water to the koala has become quite famous around the world – rightly so! It goes to show that even animals can respond positively to love, genuine concern and compassion. So we can learn from that incident and be inspired by it.

Of course, clearly the wild koala was not trained to put its paws on the person's hand. But as the fire-fighter was giving it water, you could see the koala naturally just put its paw on his hand, feeling some sort of solace – it naturally showed closeness. Of course seeing that sort of situation, on the one hand brings great sadness, but on the other hand brings some joy that with a positive attitude we can help the other.

To conclude, we can make the resolution that developing love and compassion and trying to extend it to others really is a great virtue. Love and compassion is really valuable, a great benefit to ourselves and others. And, as I also stress regularly, we need to train in extending our love and compassion to others, beginning with those who are close to us. That is how we train: beginning with those we deal with on a daily basis. Those are the people or beings to whom we begin to extend genuine love and compassion.

We can conclude for the evening on this note. In the following weeks, we can slowly follow the text. Even though we may have not covered particular passages from the actual text, if you think about the points raised this evening, they may be quite important to keep in mind in your daily life.

Before we conclude for the evening, we can spend a few more minutes in contemplation. This time, we will focus our mind 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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Edited Version

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