
The Condensed Lam Rim

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It would be good, as usual, to do some meditation. To do this it is good to sit in a comfortable position. The best motivation one could adopt is one that accomplishes the ultimate purpose of the practice of meditation. If one could think along these lines and generate a positive motivation such as, 'In order to bring peace and happiness for other beings and benefit them I need to first of all subdue my own mind and find peace and happiness within my own mind. Thus, for the ultimate purpose of benefiting others, I will engage in the practice of meditation.' Just as I encourage you to generate a positive motivation it is equally important for the teacher, in this case myself, to generate a positive motivation.

When a positive motivation is present on both sides, from the listeners as well as the teacher, then that mutual positive motivations will naturally induce a good feeling during the time we spend together. There is a good feeling that can be experienced from that. When there is a mutually good experience, a good feeling experienced on both sides, whatever activities are engaged in will definitely give rise to some benefit. One can actually get some benefit from whatever activity one may engage in. Just as that is true in a setting like this - meditation and discussion on the topics of the teaching, it is also true in our regular life. Whatever activity one may engage in, such as communication with another person, when it is engaged in with a positive motivation it will definitely induce a good feeling. Further more one can get the benefit of whatever form of communication one may engage in.

A positive motivation that is based on the attitude of wishing others to benefit from one's activities cannot be underestimated. It seems to be, in fact, the most essential element that secures one's practice to become a pure practice, what we call a pure Dharma practice, which is an authentic spiritual practice. What determines whether a practice is a pure practice or not depends very much on the positive attitude one has prior to engaging in that practise. This is something that seems to be one of the most essential points in making our practise worthwhile. Thus it is really good to pay attention to the importance of the motivation and put some effort into generating the positive motivation. This would be true in every circumstance, with every practice we engage in.

The further benefit of having engaged in a practice with a good motivation would be that, whatever time and energy one may have spent doing the practice, in the later part of your life whenever one recalls that practice it will always be something one can feel happy about and rejoice in that positive deed. Even many years later when one thinks about the time when one undertook certain practices, one can always feel joyful and happy about that. Even a meagre practice that one has engaged in with a positive attitude will contribute to gaining the long-term benefit.

A good attitude is, in essence, the wish to benefit others. That includes a wish to relieve others from any kinds of suffering and wishing them to be happy. If one can engage in an activity that can contribute to others' happiness and contributes to removing others' miseries and sufferings that is, without any doubt, something highly worthwhile and really beneficial.

To emphasise the great value and importance of that attitude we can use the example of the relationship between two people. When that good attitude is secured between two people then the relationship is nurtured and can last well. When a relationship has some difficulties what is the usual element that comes up? It is the element of either of the partners not being satisfied or not being really happy with the other. What will be uttered is, 'You are not fulfilling my wishes. You are not able to contribute to the things I want and stop the things that I don't want.' When we look into why and how disagreement occurs between two people, even though what I mentioned earlier may not be said explicitly, it seems to come down to the reality of not fulfilling each other's wishes which contributes to the others distress.

When communication or a relationship between two people deteriorates that is based upon the fact that one of the partners, or both, feel that their wishes are not being fulfilled. If one investigates further it becomes clear that the elements of a genuine sense of concern that is based on love and compassion for each other is lacking.

When a genuine sense of love and compassion is lacking from either side then the natural inclination, the natural wish to willingly fulfil the others wishes and willingly reduce harming the other will be absent. When that is absent one will definitely not be able to contribute to the other's well being. When analysed in that way we will begin to see the truth in the Buddhist claim that says that love and compassion is the very root, or the very basis, of one's happiness. When we investigate we see that when there is an attitude of genuine sense of love and compassion then there is a real sense of caring and nurturing for the other and that this contributes to the other's as well as one's own genuine sense of happiness. Whereas when that is absent, it will contribute to turmoil and difficulties and problems. It is really good to reflect upon these points to understand how love and compassion is really the root or basis of all one's happiness.

The need for a genuine sense of love and compassion that contributes to a genuine sense of concern for the other is not only in the interest of the other person but is, in fact, in one's own interest as well. We all would have noticed from our own experience that when we intentionally, or even unintentionally, begin to hurt someone else, it makes us feel uncomfortable ourselves. As soon as that intention to hurt the other arises, from that moment, our own mind starts to become disturbed. It is in turmoil, it is not in a settled state, definitely not in a peaceful, happy state. From the very moment that the attitude or the intention of wanting to hurt the other arises we experience unease within our own mind. Thus we can see clearly that when we engage in the activity of hurting another it is actually hurting ourselves. It makes us feel uncomfortable. When the opposite is practised and we contribute to the other's happiness and joy it will actually make us feel joyful and happy too.

When the genuine sense of nurturing love and compassion, which is basically expressed as concern for each other, is lacking that leads to disagreement and at times dispute with

the other. Even when both would like to consider settling their disagreements, until and unless a genuine sense of love and compassion is developed, the communication will not become very fruitful. In fact it often leads to even more turmoil. It becomes more inflammatory and there are more disputes between the two. If that happens it is a clear sign of the lack of the genuine concern for the other. Thus the communications do not work out well.

The reality is that most of us experience a lack of genuine peace in our mind; the lack of a genuine sense of a settled mind. Our mind seems to be in turmoil and agitated most of the time. If one finds that one's mind is agitated and in turmoil, the technique to bring about a more settled and peaceful mind is the practice of meditation. This is where the value of meditation comes in. It is a technique that can contribute to settling down the mind, to making it more peaceful and steadier, so that it does not become completely unstable.

Now, in order to engage in the practice of meditation as a technique to settle one's mind, one must first of all commit oneself for the next few minutes to not allowing one's mind to be influenced by various thoughts or ideas that contribute to the mind being unrestful. In short, for the next minutes we intentionally block out the various objects of distraction. Rather we bring the attention inward and then focus on the object of meditation. By focussing on to the object of meditation, which in this case is our own breath, we completely withdraw our mind from external factors. The technique itself is to just observe our natural breathing, the air naturally flowing in and out of ourselves. So, we can engage in that for the next few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*).

That will be sufficient for now. As we would have noticed in our meditation now, as far as the technique goes, it is not that complicated. It is really quite simple, just focusing on one's breath. However, when done properly even for a few minutes, focusing on one's breath it definitely contributes to settling down the mind. And when the mind is settled down we will start to develop more awareness in our mind and the practice of meditation will help to protect our mind from the turmoil that regularly goes on and protect the joy and happiness of our mind. As far as the technique goes it is not really complicated. It is a matter of actually putting it into practice.

However practising meditation randomly will not bring about sustaining results. Rather, if you can continuously apply a few minutes to the practice of meditation on a regular basis in your daily life, you will definitely start to gain some real benefit from it. The teachings advise not to be too hasty and not to initially have long meditation sessions. Initially it is advisable to stick to short durations and meditate more frequently. Then, as we slowly become more familiar with the practise we can have longer durations of meditation. If we can regularly practise in short sessions, even for a few minutes a day, that would really be a benefit and protect the mind. There are a few who have commented that having a short duration is a good advice as it is manageable. It seems that a short duration and getting something meaningful out of the short duration is actually appropriate, because in the western culture, generally speaking, we seem to want quick results in a short time.

A further benefit is that if we actually engage in the practise of meditation we begin to notice the actual benefits of it for

ourselves. When we see the benefits derived in even a few minutes then we can relate to the overall benefits of the meditation practice. Even though we may have busy lives and we may not be able to manage to spend most of our time in the practise of meditation, we will, at least, develop an inspiration from seeing the value of meditation. The experience we get from even a short time of meditation will develop a natural inspiration towards the practice of meditation, because one has actually experienced the benefit of it.

If we were to just leave it on the level of hearing the benefits of the practice of meditation but never actually attempt to practise, we may initially agree that it sounds good. But, because we have not actually experienced something ourselves when it really comes down to deriving benefit from the practise of meditation, we will not have received much benefit from it. In other words, mere knowledge is not sufficient.

A fault that may arise if we don't actually put it into practice is that having heard of the benefits of the practise of meditation a number of times for quite a number of years, if we find that our mind has not really transformed and is still prone to becoming easily agitated then the fault of that lies in not having really applied the knowledge we have gained from the teachings. Even after many years we might feel that we have not really changed or transformed. It is important to understand where the fault arises from, otherwise there are incidents where people after hearing the teachings for many years feel that they have not really transformed much and it has not really helped them in their lives. They then start criticising the teachings by saying that it has no value.

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 strives 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

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.2.2. How is it gathered

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.2.2.1. An explanation of who gathers the karma that projects one through cyclic existence

We are studying the text called *Lam Rim* or *The Graduated Path to Enlightenment* in English. Last year we covered the sections regarding how one enters into cyclic existence. That is subdivided into three main categories. Firstly the explanation of the delusions, which are causes for entering the cyclic existence, was given. Then, secondly, the explanation of how one creates karma through the delusions was given. We went into the detail of the explanation of karma. The third category is how death occurs and after death how the connection to the next life is made.

The above is explained within the context of the four noble truths, specifically the second noble truth - the truth of the origination of suffering. The first noble truth, which is the truth of suffering was explained earlier. The second noble truth, the truth of the origination of suffering explains how one enters into cyclic existence.

As explained previously, there are two main origins of suffering, which are delusions and karma. The teachings explain that within these two causes, delusions and karma, the delusions are the primary cause. Delusions are the main cause for one to create the type of karma that leads us to be reborn into cyclic existence. In explaining that, as mentioned

previously, even if one still had some karma but didn't have the delusions then at the time of death there will not be a cause for one to be reborn in the lower realms. That is how it is explained.

The topic of the delusions was subdivided into explaining the delusions in general and explaining the specific delusions. In introducing the specific delusions they were subdivided into ten; five of which are views or speculative delusions and five of which are non-speculative delusions. When the question was raised whether there was a sequence in which the delusions arise, the teachings went into the details of how the delusions arise sequentially. Further, when the text raises the rhetorical question of whether there are causes for the delusions, the text went into explaining how certain conditions causes the delusions to arise within one. Then the faults of the delusions were specifically explained.

In the next category, introducing karma, that was also explained in two main categories; how karma is accumulated and the types of karma that is accumulated. After introducing how the karma is accumulated the text went into explaining the person who accumulates the karma. The specific karma which serves as the cause for being reborn in the cyclic existence is called projecting karma, which is a type of karma that propels one into the future existence. So if asked what kind of person accumulates projecting karma? There are only two types of beings who could possibly create karma; ordinary beings who do not have any realisations, and superior beings or, in Sanskrit, arya beings. Superior beings and ordinary beings create karma. However arya beings do not accumulate or create projecting karma. The text went into detail explaining why the arya beings do not create projecting karma with quotes from the Buddha's teachings. We explained that in detail. So, the person who accumulates projecting karma is an ordinary being.

In relation to the types of karma that are accumulated, the text explained three primary types of karma. These are meritorious karma, non-meritorious karma and unfluctuating karma.

In discussing how karma is accumulated, I went into some detail of how whenever karma is accumulated it is accumulated in relation to having a strong grasping at the self. Whenever there is a strong grasping at the self then negative states of mind, such as attachment towards things that which seem favourable to oneself, and aversion to those things that seem unfavourable to the self is developed.

If one starts investigating how attachment and aversion arises in relation to the grasping at 'I' or 'me'; first there is a strong sense of feeling of 'I' or 'me'. When that is strong it labels certain things as being favourable to oneself and other things as unfavourable to oneself. Thus, in brief, because we have this natural inclination of wishing for happiness and not wishing to experience any kind of suffering, we engage in lots of activities to try to bring about happiness for oneself and to avoid suffering for oneself.

In relation to the strong grasping to the 'I' or the self, there is a natural inclination to wish for happiness for the 'I' or 'self' and not wish to experience any kind of unease or sufferings in relation to the self. As far as that natural inclination goes, we could say that there is nothing really wrong with that. However, when that desire for happiness is accompanied with a strong sense of 'me' and that importance is only in relation to oneself, then the fault of engaging in many kinds

of devious and unethical ways to get happiness just for oneself, regardless of how it affects others, is developed. When there is a lack of concern for others and only a self-interest, then that is where one would engage in activities that contribute to what we call negative karma. Regardless of how it affects others, one wishes for some sort of happiness just for oneself and wishes merely to avoid suffering for oneself. The stronger that sense of wishing to gain happiness just for oneself and not wishing to experience suffering just for oneself is, the stronger that sort of selfish attitude becomes.

We engage in many kinds of activities that eventually hurt others and one self respectively. However when that natural inclination that we have of wishing to be happy and not wishing to experience suffering is related to others and we use it as a basis to generate concern for others, then it becomes positive. We can think 'Just as I wish for happiness and do not wish to experience any kinds of suffering, others also wish for happiness and do not wish for any suffering. Thus I must not focus just merely on myself but also take others into consideration'. When that sense or attitude is based upon others then that is where love and compassion is developed. When we take others into consideration, the greater the genuine sense of concern we have for other's welfare, wishing them to be free from suffering, the stronger love and compassion is developed within oneself.

The very strong sense of grasping at the self, so strong that one clings to oneself even at the expense of others, is what we call the selfish attitude. If one notices that this is becoming quite strong within oneself then a good way to overcome that strong sense of clinging and grasping to the self is, as just mentioned earlier, to immediately contemplate, 'I am feeling a very strong concern for my own happiness and wishing for suffering to be removed for myself'. If the focus is only upon one self in a selfish way it actually brings up a feeling of being uptight. You can actually experience a feeling like a knot within oneself. In order to get relief from that very strong self-centeredness it would be useful to immediately reflect upon the attitude that one has towards others. 'Just as I feel a very strong self interest likewise all other living creatures also have a natural sense of wishing to be happy and wishing to be free from suffering. Thus there are many more others who actually have that same wish that I feel myself'. By the mere fact of reflecting upon that reality, one would notice that the strong grip on self-centeredness begins to loosen, which will give immediate relief to our mind.

Having completed these topics we come to the third category that is the manner of how one dies and makes the connection to the next life, which we will cover in our sessions in the following weeks.

Before we conclude for the evening we can again spend a few minutes in contemplation. This time we focus on the sound of the mantra being recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra, and try to maintain our focus on that.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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