
The Condensed Lam Rim

ལྷན་ཁྲིམས་ལྟོ་སྐོར་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བརྒྱུག་པ་སྟེ།

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It is a warm evening. Our body seems to be really fussy about weather conditions. If it's too hot it is a problem, and if it's too cold it is a problem. Our body is really vulnerable to weather conditions.

As usual it would good to spend some time in meditation. Meditation, according to the Tibetan connotation of the word, means to familiarise the mind with the chosen object by focusing single-pointedly on it. Initially we can choose any object; the main aim is to develop a single-pointed concentration.

We can experience how difficult it is when we attempt to meditate. Even after one or two minutes we begin to feel our minds becoming a little fidgety and agitated. We accept and understand the benefits of meditation, yet when we attempt to meditate it is not easy. As it is rather difficult to meditate, we need to check up and find out why that may be so. One of the reasons could be that we are not able to control our own mind.

Not having control over our mind means that, first of all we are under the domain of our thoughts, which are swayed by distractions and delusions. Our mind is overpowered by thoughts and they are, in turn, influenced by our delusions. We know our mind is being overpowered when, even if we make an attempt to focus on something, we can't maintain that focus. We immediately find that our mind is getting distracted. If we can reverse the situation, where we take control over our own mind and thoughts, then we can have more influence over where to direct our mind. This is a big step forward.

Our mind has not reached the point where we are able to put the mind to service at will. This is because, firstly, we are not able to control our own mind, and secondly because our mind has not reached the stage of serviceability. Because of these two factors, we are not able to focus well on our chosen object. As long as we are under the control of the deluded mind, the mind remains distracted. As long as we have an uncontrolled mind it will be constantly in a distracted state, and it is not just external objects that distract the mind. Of course external objects can serve as a condition for the mind to become distracted, but even when there are no external objects that serve as an immediate condition to distract the mind, the mind can still be distracted. In that case a distracted mind is caused by delusions which arise in the form of conceptual thoughts.

To give an analogy to illustrate how distractions come mostly from within, we can take an example of two people who have the same external circumstances such as

sufficient food, clothing, shelter and living conditions. Even with exactly the same living conditions, we find that one person may have a more happy and joyous mind whereas the other person may not have such a happy and joyous mind. So what this points out is that even though the external conditions are exactly the same for both people, other factors cause the mind to be unhappy or happy.

In the case of these two people, the reason why one has a happy state of mind is because they have, in addition to external good conditions, the internal conditions for the mind to be joyous and happy. Whereas the other person, who does not have such a happy and joyful mind, is mostly under the influence of worries and anxiety. Even though their external conditions are exactly the same, what's lacking for one is the internal conditions necessary for a happy and joyous mind. Rather than having the conditions for a happy and joyous mind, they have the conditions for anxiety and worry, which leads them to be mostly swayed by disturbances of anxiety and worry.

The main condition for a happy and joyous mind lies within us. And likewise the factors which bring disturbance in the mind, mainly distraction, also lie within us. Delusions manifest in the form of distractions. When we begin to recognise that fact, then it is very important for us to make sure that we don't fall victim to a distracted mind. We need to protect our mind as much as possible from delusions and distractions.

It is at this point that we begin to recognise that meditation is the best technique for protecting the mind from delusions and distractions. Even though meditation protects us from distractions, the results don't come about easily or quickly. Meditation means familiarity, which implies taking time to acquaint oneself with the object of meditation. Through familiarity, constant diligence and effort, we will be able to reach the point of developing single-pointed concentration. The virtue of single-pointed concentration is as explained in the teachings; once we have developed single-pointed concentration, then when we focus on an object, it would be as firm as Mount Meru. Mount Meru is a mountain that symbolises the largest mountain that can ever exist. A huge mountain cannot be swayed or moved easily; it's very firm and stable. Likewise when we develop single-pointed concentration, our focus would be as stable as this huge mountain called Mount Meru. The size of the mountain also signifies the distractions we have within us; we could be affected by distractions as large as the mountain. But once we have developed single-pointed concentration, even distractions as large as the mountain can't disturb us, or distract us from the focus on our object.

The second benefit of concentration is that the mind is able to be focus on all virtuous objects. Also one will experience physical and mental pliancy along with a blissful sensation.

We have to clearly identify and recognise the faults of a mind influenced by delusions. For example, when our mind is dominated by anger, do we feel happy at that time? Does it actually give us any true satisfaction and joy in our mind? It is clear that when our mind is influenced

by a delusion such as anger, it is not conducive to our well-being; it does not bring joy and happiness to the mind. To the contrary, it brings disturbances. So it is in our interest that we try to protect our mind from being influenced by delusions such as anger. It is important to make every attempt to practice meditation, as it is the only way to give us that protection.

When the mind is affected by delusions, this leads to an unhappy state of mind. This disturbance of the mind is important for us to understand well, not only for the sake of dealing with our own mind, but also as a means to understand others' minds. This understanding can benefit us, especially in a relationship when we can be easily affected by others' emotions. For example, when our friend or partner is in a state of anger, this can easily make us feel upset and angry too, which does not benefit us at all. The mind of anger is a disturbed mind, a mind that is under the control of delusions, and it is not a happy mind.

Using the earlier reasons based on our own experience helps us to understand the other person's mental situation. We can reason that if they are expressing emotions of anger, then this means that they are under the control of emotions and anger, and that in turn means that they are not in a happy state of mind. They are in a disturbed state of mind. So naturally they act in a way that may seem irrational and unreasonable. This is because they are not in their right state of mind, but rather under the control of the delusion of anger.

So instead of feeling upset and angry with our friend or partner, we could develop compassion. We could feel compassion for them because of the mental disturbance they are experiencing. In this way, rather than affecting us in a negative way, others people's emotions can actually become a cause for us to develop more compassion while maintaining our own peace of mind.

When we notice a friend or partner who is under the strong influence of a negative emotion such as anger, if we can start to develop a sense of compassion towards them, then that in turn will allow us to be able to communicate with them in a more effective way. We will be able to talk to them in a calm and soothingly manner. When someone is in a disturbed state of mind, the worst thing that could happen is something that contributes to more agitation. Getting more upset and angry towards them will make them only angrier; it will fuel their anger and it will become worse. But if you can use soothing and kind words and show a positive gesture towards them, then the intensity of their anger will subside. The way to help angry people is to calm them down by giving them good, nourishing food and pleasant drinks and make them feel comfortable. This will make them feel relaxed and calm. After a few minutes they would most probably turn around and apologise for their angry behaviour. When the other person apologises for their behaviour, then both of you can begin to smile and laugh again.

Now, having explained a bit about the benefits and the techniques of meditation, it's worthwhile to actually spend a few minutes in meditation. The first piece of advice typically given for the practice of meditation is to sit in a comfortable position. The important point is to be

comfortable. We must remember that it is the mind which is meditating; it's not the physical body. The most important thing, whether sitting on the floor or on a chair, is to have a relaxed body and mind. The main point is to try to have an alert mind.

The physical posture should not be too rigid or too formal. If we were to adopt for example the suggested vajra posture, sitting cross-legged in a full lotus position, and if we are not familiar with that posture, then this could cause pain in the knees. If we were to sit in that position when it's not comfortable for us, then when we try to meditate, our focus will be constantly distracted by the pain we are feeling in our knees and then we would not be able to meditate at all. So it is good to adopt a comfortable sitting position, otherwise the pain in our knee may turn out to be the actual object of focus. We will lose the focus on our chosen object of meditation and instead it goes towards the pain in the knee. In the very attempt of meditating, we may actually be hurting our knee instead.

Now the next important point in the practice of meditation is described as setting the appropriate positive motivation. The motivation, according to our tradition, is to develop an attitude of loving and kindness. All the techniques that were presented earlier in overcoming the distractions and delusions in our mind eventually lead to a more compassionate and kinder mind. So the ultimate goal of practising meditation is to develop a kinder and more compassionate heart. From the very beginning when we engage in the practice of meditation, it is worthwhile to develop a state of mind where we can induce an attitude of loving kindness within ourselves as the purpose of our meditation. The technique of meditation involves intentionally withdrawing our mind from all external and internal distractions, and just bringing it inwards.

Having withdrawn our mind from all distractions, we place it upon the chosen object which is in this case our breath. We place our full attention and focus on our breath and nothing else; a one hundred per cent focus on the breath. So for the next few minutes, while observing our natural breathing, we try to maintain our focus.

(Pause for meditation).

As I normally share with those who seek my advice; just as we attempt to better the conditions in our lives by external means, which usually means making money and acquiring things, likewise it would be good if we could pay equal, if not more, attention to developing the internal conditions for us to have a happy mind. So just as we spend time and energy in acquiring material things for our well being, it would be most worthwhile if we could also spend some time and energy in developing the internal conditions. If we have spent some time developing our internal conditions sufficiently, then even if we were to lack great material gains, I feel that it is still worthwhile to have spent some time and energy developing the inner conditions for happiness and joy. That would be much more worthwhile than to have spent all our time and energy just developing external conditions. That is how I feel anyway; whether it is true for you is something for you to investigate and find out.

However, sticking to my beliefs, I feel that it is definitely worthwhile to spend time and energy in developing the internal conditions. Practically speaking, of course we need to have the external conditions of sufficient wealth and money with a secure job and so forth. Especially when I relate to the younger generation, I explain that it is important that they think about how to secure themselves financially. However while doing so, it is equally important to also pay attention to developing the internal conditions for happiness and joy.

If we have spent time and energy in developing external conditions and have reached a point of acquiring quite a bit of external wealth and are still not happy, then at that point, we need to look into our situation and ask ourselves whether something is lacking. Maybe there is something lacking. Maybe we are lacking the attention in developing our internal conditions. Maybe we are spending too much time and energy just focusing outwardly on external gains. It is good to try to find a balance in our life. The main point I'm trying to make is that practically speaking, we need to have a good balance between external wealth and internal wealth. Just as we need good external conditions for our well being, we also need to develop internal conditions to maintain a happy state of mind.

A disturbed state of mind is full of disturbing thoughts, such as anxiety, frustration, tension and depression. All of these disturbances occur from an overly excited and distracted mind. An overly distracted mind leads to those disturbing unwanted states of mind. If we can recognise that and accept that, then the point made about how meditation helps us becomes more tangible, because meditation is a technique where we train our mind to withdraw from all distractions and keep it focussed on neutral or positive objects. This practice removes us from the causes and conditions of the disturbances in our mind, which are our distractions. Meditation is always emphasised as being an excellent technique for calming the mind. If we work on having a happy joyous mind, then this will have a positive effect on our health as well. As there is a definite connection between a happy mind and a healthy body.

Meditation is the ultimate means of protecting the joy and happiness in our mind. Continuous meditation practice leads us to joy and happiness. Even in old age we can reach that state of mind, where joy and happiness follow naturally. I mention this through the experiences of some of my good friends; some elderly women who are in their 90s. They have personally related to me that they are already in a very happy and joyful state. They attribute that to the practice of the meditation they had done in an earlier part of their life, and which they had continued with.

What we learn from that is that if we also were to adopt the practice of meditation and try to be consistent with it in our life, then we will definitely also experience and reap those results in the later part of our life as well. Even in old age, the mind is not only happy and joyful but also very clear and lucid; still an intelligent mind. That can be attributed to the practice of meditation.

Another benefit of having a happy and joyous mind is that we will never experience the suffering of loneliness. Whereas someone who lacks a sense of real joy and happiness in the mind, even if they are surrounded by people, even if they have someone nice and perfectly adorable to live with, somehow it doesn't seem to be enough for them. They don't even seem to be happy and joyful about having someone nice to live with. Whereas someone who has a happy joyous mind, is not deprived of companionship and friendship. Even if they were to be physically alone, as they maintain a happy joyous mind, it prevents the suffering of loneliness.

Since none of us wish to experience the suffering of loneliness, our most faithful companion is a happy joyous mind. So we can all aspire to have a happy joyous mind, which is our real protector from loneliness. Practicing dharma is about protecting one's mind from unfavourable conditions.

Before we finish the session we can spend a few minutes in meditation again; this time we focus on the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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