
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual it would be good to spend some time in meditation. For the purpose of meditation, it is good to find an upright and comfortable sitting position. Sitting in an upright position is significant for the practice of meditation as one straightens one's spine and that allows the channels within the body, what are called the energy channels, to straighten out. When the energy channels are straightened, that allows the wind energy to flow well within the channels. This then consequently helps the mind to be fresh and focused. When the channels are straightened the wind energy flows freely within one's body which allows the mind to be focused and clear. And this is very important for the practice of meditation.

If we are not careful about our sitting postures we might start getting aches in our back and neck and other parts of our body. This seems to be very much related to the wind energy not being able to flow well within one's body. If the wind energy is blocked as a consequence it can cause unease in the body.

It may seem that I am often repeating myself in these sessions. However I think it is significant that I explain the technique again and again as a reminder, and hopefully that will prompt you to meditate. Through the combination of me reminding you of the points and you trying to put that into practice, we can get a good result.

If we were to again consider why we need to practise meditation, then we can reflect upon the very simple, basic reason. The reality is that we all wish to be happy. We want to have the happiness of a peaceful mind. If a peaceful, happy mind is what we are striving for then that can be achieved through the practice of meditation.

Another main purpose of the practice of meditation is that it is a means or technique to protect the mind. One may ask, 'What are we protecting the mind from?' The answer is we are protecting it from the influence of the delusions. When the mind is influenced by the delusions it becomes distracted. What we are attempting to do in meditation is to withdraw our mind from all deluded distractions and bring our mind inward to focus on a virtuous or neutral object. That will help us to gain the positive results.

In summary, withdrawing our mind from the distractions, what we call the delusions, and trying to maintain a single-pointed focus on a virtuous object is the way we protect our mind from its adversaries.

At this point, those who have attempted to practise meditation and have succeeded to some extent may have a question or doubt in their mind. It seems possible to withdraw the mind from distractions and the delusions and remain focused on the chosen object for a period of time, initially for maybe a few minutes and then when one becomes more familiar for half an hour, and during that time

one may not have delusions manifest that disturb one's mind. However when one comes out of the meditation one might be again disturbed and influenced by the delusions.

So, the doubt or question arises, 'Why is that so?' Because this occurs, it may seem that the practice we are doing is quite futile. In every attempt we make, it seems that we go back to square one again.

Once we come out of the practice of meditation the reason we find ourselves becoming easily distracted and influenced by the delusions is primarily because we have not really acquainted ourselves with the virtuous object of meditation. A virtuous object is an object that does not cause delusions to arise. We have not acquainted ourselves well enough with that object, but on the other hand we are very acquainted with the objects of delusion. Because of this, as soon as we come into contact with, for example, an object of desire then desire immediately arises in us.

Initially we are not drawn to focusing on an object that does not cause or lessens desire. Even if we are drawn to focus on a virtuous object we find it very hard to maintain that focus. But if we were to familiarise ourselves more and more with the object that causes the delusions will reduce, and the more we familiarise ourselves the more likely it is that the delusions are going to subside within us.

If one were to claim that having meditated for a long period of time, a year or two, and that when one goes outside and interacts in the world, desire and other delusions still arise very spontaneously and uncontrollably, then this shows that we have missed the point in our practice of meditation. If we find that we are easily influenced by the delusions, desire and so forth, and when they arise it is hard to withdraw from them, then that is showing the habituation of us acquainting with the object of desire for a long period of time. That seems very easy and natural for us.

What we are attempting to do in our practice of meditation is to familiarise ourselves more and more with an object that subdues the delusions and to be less acquainted with the objects of the delusions. The more we familiarise our mind with a positive object and the more we are less familiar with the objects of the delusions, the more we will come to a point within ourselves where even if we were to come into contact with an object of desire, acquaintance with the positive object is more natural. It overpowers the state of mind that is easily influenced by the delusions. As a result, at a very advanced stage when we come into contact with objects of our desire, for example, desire may not even arise. Even if the object is present desire may not arise. At a lesser stage, if desire were to still arise in one's mind it would not be very intense and we would be able to recognise that desire within oneself and be able to overcome it before it reaches an intense level. That would be the results of the practice.

A simpler example is where we experience anger in our mind in relation to an object. We experience aggravation and agitation in our mind due to coming into contact with that object. The more we recall the object that causes anger the more likely it is that anger will arise in our mind; that is a natural consequence. When you think about the object, or come into contact with it, it will cause anger in your mind.

When this happens, if we were to start thinking about another object, an object that does not cause anger in one's mind, we would immediately find relief from that emotion of anger, because we have diverted our attention. We chose to focus on an object that does not cause anger to arise in the

mind. Due to that very factor we will find relief from the anger within one's mind. It is the same with attachment. If a particular object causes desire or attachment to arise within one's mind then the more we were to think about that object, the more likely it is that desire would arise in our mind. If we think about another object that does not cause desire to arise it will help to lessen desire.

It is basically that sort of technique that we are using in the practice of meditation. We are familiarising ourselves with an object that does not cause particular delusions to arise in the mind and which serves, in fact, as an antidote to overcome the delusions. The more we familiarise ourselves in that way by focusing on the opposite of the objects that cause delusions to arise in the mind, the more likely our mind will be free from those negative states of mind or negative emotions.

The more we acquaint ourselves with an object that, for example, does not cause anger to arise but rather causes anger to subside within oneself, the more likely it is that anger will not arise in our mind. The intensity of feeling aggressive or angry in one's mind will definitely be reduced. If we continuously engage in that practice then the instances of anger arising will become less and less. That means our mind will be freer from the negative emotion of anger and definitely get relief. We can definitely bring about that result within us through familiarity and practice. This is something that we can testify to through our own experience. If we were to actually put this into practice, we would begin to see those positive consequences taking place within us. That is testifying to the relevance or the benefit of the meditation practice from one's own experience.

Once we begin to understand these points and how meditation practice actually works within one's own mind, one's own psyche, we also begin to get a deeper understanding of Dharma practice. Dharma practice is described as a means to protect one's mind from negativities and adverse circumstances. The actual meaning of Dharma practice will become more apparent to one. In fact Dharma practice and meditation are synonymous; they are both means of subduing the mind.

Having spent some time explaining the benefits of the practice of meditation we can now actually spend some time in meditation. In order to engage in the practice of meditation, we should reassess our physical posture and our mental state. For the practice to be a genuine and unique practice of meditation, we need to intentionally withdraw our mind from all distractions and bring the focus of our attention inward, within ourselves.

For the purpose of our practice here we choose the breath as our object of focus. Thus we place our full attention and focus upon the breath. The teachings advise the breath to be free from certain conditions. We should not breathe deeply and heavily or make any sound as we breathe in. Preferably we should breathe very gently and naturally through our nostrils.

As a means to help maintain our focus on the breath it is also advised that we can keep track of the count of our breath going in and out. In this way we will be able to maintain a continuous focus on the breath itself. We can spend the next few minutes in practice in this manner. (*Pause for meditation*)

It would be very beneficial if you could regularly spend some time in meditation like this. The benefit can be attested to through one's own experience. One would notice that even a few minutes where the mind is not disturbed by all

sorts of different thoughts and distractions, causes one to experience some relief and some calmness within one's own mind.

The relief that we experience during even a short time of meditation practice is due to the mind not being influenced by the distractions that regularly cause disturbance in the mind. It might not even be apparent to us right away, but when we are engaged in the outside world our minds are constantly busy with the distractions that cause disturbance in the mind.

If we ask how the distractions cause disturbance; the distractions are basically something that we pursue in the wish and the hope that they will bring us some satisfaction. But in reality they cause disturbance in the mind. There are two main reasons that disturbances can occur in the mind. In all our wishes we hope to gain something favourable for ourselves but the reality is that we never seem to gain what we really are longing for, even in a worldly sense. What we really long for seems to be out of reach and we never seem to be satisfied in gaining what we want. Conversely what we don't wish for seems to come about very easily. We seem to always experience those things that we don't wish for. We are not able to obtain the things that we wish for whilst we get the things that we don't wish for. That causes disturbance and the mind to be in upheaval all the time.

It is basically these two states of mind that cause disturbance in the mind. We are trying to pursue that what we wish and long for, but are not achieving what we want, and that creates a disturbance or unease in the mind. We are also constantly trying to avoid problems and difficulties, but those problems and difficulties seem to occur naturally all the time. Regardless of our status, regardless of our race, regardless of whether we are rich or poor, these factors that disturb the mind are prevalent and the same for everyone. This is something to consider.

The practice of meditation is a very, very practical technique to overcome disturbance and bring relief to the mind. When we withdraw from all the preconceptions and our wishes and desires and remain focused on a chosen virtuous or neutral object it brings immediate relief to the mind because it is suddenly diverted from all of those distractions.

We can begin a practice of meditation with just a few minutes at a time, say five minutes at one time. If we begin with five minutes at a certain period of the day we can then maybe do another five minutes in another part of the day. We can divide the day into four sessions and do five minute meditations four times a day. If one becomes more acquainted with meditation it could be five times per day. But even four times a day added up will be twenty minutes. Each time it is only five minutes but when added up it is twenty minutes of sound relief to the mind every day.

Initially, when we are not acquainted with the practice, it is advised not to do prolonged meditation. We would not actually be able to do it. It is quite impossible for a beginner to sit down for twenty minutes in straight meditation and keep the mind focused. But five minutes is something that could be manageable. Even if it is not five minutes initially we could begin with a few minutes. As we acquaint ourselves with meditation we can slowly prolong the duration of our practice of meditation as we become more and more familiar.

Spending a few minutes at a time in meditation is also a very practical approach as in this time and age we all have very busy lives. Many people claim that they don't have time to

meditate. Meditation might be all very well, might be very beneficial, but one doesn't have the time for it. If we are attempting to meditate for a long period of time we could, maybe rightly, justify that we don't have time to meditate if we are thinking that meditation requires twenty minutes or half an hour or an hour at a time. But five minutes at a time, that is something that could be manageable. Five minutes of our day, a few times a day, to begin at a particular time and then to extend that is more manageable in our very busy lives.

This is a technique if one wishes to have a more relaxed, more joyous and happy state of mind. If we completely neglect the technique, the genuine method of calming and soothing the mind, we would find ourselves with more and more problems in our life because there would be more and more things that we would desire that we will not get. Further, more and more things that we want to avoid will keep happening. We will not get any relief from these two states of constantly trying to pursue the things that one wishes for but not getting them and experiencing difficulties that one doesn't wish for. Between these two states we don't get any relief and the mind is constantly in a disturbed state. If this escalates and gets worse that is where real psychological problems such as anxiety, depression and so forth begin to occur.

If we want to have a relief from this, and don't want to go in that downward spiral falling into those states of mind, then it is to our own interest and benefit to actually attempt to practice some meditation. If there were another technique, some other means, to bring some joy and some peace in the mind beside meditation then by all means we could pursue that. But I can safely say that there is no other technique besides the practice of meditation to bring a genuine sense of calming and soothing to our mind. Thus in our daily lives, in our busy lives full of worries and so forth, if we can get even a few minutes of relief in our mind isn't that really worthwhile? Isn't that time spent in meditation worthwhile in our life?

Some people complain that there is not enough time because of their work. In any kind of job it seems that everyone gets a lunch break. Depending on one's work, what one does, it seems that people get up to 45 minutes for a lunch break. If one is getting 45 minutes one could perhaps use five minutes of that time for the practice of meditation. Forty minutes could be for lunch, but five minutes could be meditation time. Using that opportunity is one way of not allowing oneself to trick oneself into thinking that there is no time to meditate.

Likewise, in the morning before we go out to our work we can again commit ourselves to spending five minutes in meditation. If that requires us to take five minutes off of our usual breakfast time then maybe we commit to doing that. If it means we wake up five minutes earlier than usual (*Geshe-la laughs*), maybe we can try to resolve in that way.

It is in our own interest that we find the time to engage in something that is really useful and beneficial for ourselves. We can attest to the fact that meditation is beneficial, it is a worthwhile doing it, so it is something that we need to exert and commit ourselves to actually make the time for.

If we were to commit ourselves to spending some time in meditation and adopt the right technique in that meditation then the positive effect of meditation will definitely take place. One's whole appearance and one's whole being will be somewhat more appealing. One's partner or friend will

notice that. If one's partner notices that there is a positive change, that one has a good appearance then they will start to support our meditation. They might even say, 'Why don't you spend a little bit more time in meditation? I'll make the tea for you. I'll make breakfast for you.'

This is a practical way of contributing to the harmony in one's relationship, in one's family and so forth. If the other can feel the positive effect of one's practice that will naturally bring about a harmonious feeling and nice expressions to each other and so forth. In this way it will help the relationship to be a good one.

At this point if anyone would like to ask a question you may raise your hand. Otherwise we could go through the text.

Question: Can meditation practice be a benefit to someone at a low point such as depression?

Answer: As long as the person has some intelligence, some awareness of their own state of mind and the ability to determine from what is right and wrong, meditation can definitely be a benefit. The answer is that meditation will definitely benefit them and help them to slowly come out of that situation and benefit at that time. Of course, if it is someone who has reached a point where they have no real discriminative awareness then it can be difficult.

When I use the term 'discriminative awareness' I mean the intelligence of knowing what is right and wrong for oneself. The practice of meditation can benefit in any circumstance. Normally we might fall into different traps or mental states, and the mind is completely diverted in many different directions. That is one of the causes of being in a constant state of anxiety. The very technique of the practice of meditation involves not only settling down the mind, but in the attempt to focus on an object one is combining the potential, the energy, of the mind into one stream. It brings it all together. Thus the practice of meditation is a technique to place the full attention, full focus upon one object.

As mentioned previously, if we can actually spend five minutes using that proper technique of meditation it definitely brings some relief. It's as if the mind gets a rest from its very busy, very agitated and very discursive state. It seems that there is quite a trend these days to find a means to relax. There is no better genuine relaxation than meditation. It gives real relaxation to the mind.

Before we end the session for the evening, we can again spend a few minutes in meditation and this time we use the sound of the mantra of Buddha Shakyamuni as an object to focus on.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version*

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