
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual we can spend some time in meditation. As most of you would already be meditators, I don't have to remind you too much. Nevertheless, one thing to make sure of is to sit in a comfortable and relaxed posture. Then it would be good to try to have a bright and clear mind.

The attempt to make our mind bright and clear is very significant for whatever purpose we wish to achieve. The quality of our mind being bright and clear is actually the fundamental potential of the mind. When we are able to come to a bright and clear state of mind we are able to be very clear about achieving our purpose and it is much more manageable in that state of mind. Thus, to try to adopt a very bright and clear mind at the very outset is very significant for the purpose of the practice of the meditation.

As we try to adopt a bright and clear mind it is equally important for us to generate a positive motivation. This is a positive attitude that we develop in our mind. The significance of having a bright and clear mind that will consequently generate a happy state of mind is something that we can even identify from the external appearance of someone. When someone appears to be quite jovial and good-natured, happy person that person is most likely to have a bright and clear state of mind. Whereas, a dull state of mind, which contributes to the mind feeling weighed down and heavy, will bring about a sad look on someone's face. The facial expression of someone is something external that we are able to detect. When we are in the presence of these two different types of individual, a happy joyous person and a sad person, they have a very different effect upon us. We can see from this the significance of the two different types of states of mind.

The fundamental, positive state of mind is a genuine attitude of wishing to benefit others. The wish to benefit others is considered a positive state of mind for which, if we look within ourselves, we definitely have the basis. We have the basis of kindness and altruism within ourselves. Since we already have the basis for positive states of mind within ourselves it is highly worthwhile that we cultivate and further develop those positive states of mind so that they increase.

One of the fundamental natures of a positive state of mind is that the more we express the outcome of a positive state of mind the more the positive state of mind increases, rather than diminishing. This is unlike external possessions where the more we use something, the more likely that it finishes and is exhausted quicker. But the more we express an inner quality such as the positive

state of mind of kindness, the wish to help others, the more it will increase. Since it only increases rather than decreases by use it is to our interest and that of others that we increase those positive states of mind.

For example just having the knowledge to do something will not make us a skilled person in that area. The skill comes as we familiarise ourselves with that action or activity. The more experience we have in performing that activity the more skilful we will become. It is similar with the inner qualities of the mind. The more that they are expressed the more they increase. Thus it is worthwhile that we express our inner qualities. Again this is unlike the external possessions. For example if you possess something new and use it, by the next year it will already have become old. The more you use it the more its qualities diminish, whereas the more we use inner qualities the more they increase in strength and value.

When we think about this we need not worry too much about being miserly with external resources since they will be used and get old anyway. But there is no need to be miserly with our inner qualities. We might be miserly with external possessions but we need not be miserly with our inner qualities because as we use them they will increase in value. Being miserly with external objects such as money is generally considered a non-virtue. Miserliness can, however, be considered a virtue because if you are not being miserly with your money you wouldn't be able to save as much. In terms of one's financial situation miserliness can be considered a virtue as it saves money. Whereas if you are miserly with inner qualities it is not going to contribute to increasing those inner qualities, rather it will diminish them. Thus it is the opposite with the inner qualities. One should not be miserly with inner qualities if you wish them to increase.

We have explained that the more we use or acquaint ourselves with the inner qualities the more they increase. It is the same with the negative qualities. Negative states of mind are something that we try to reduce and avoid familiarising ourselves with. Inner positive qualities are something that we need to try to familiarise and acquaint ourselves with and increase in strength.

When we use our intelligence to investigate phenomena we are using what Buddhism calls analytical wisdom. Initially we use analytical wisdom to differentiate the positive qualities from negative states of mind. Then, we use that intelligence to detect the advantages of positive states of mind and the disadvantages of negative states of mind. Then, the next step is to acquaint ourselves with the positive and try to increase the positive qualities and to slowly try to eliminate the negative states of mind that are harmful to ourselves and others. This is how we progress.

This process of increasing the positive states of mind and slowly eliminating negative states of mind is the practice of meditation. That is what the practice of meditation involves. In short we can say the practice of meditation is the process of clearing our mind of negativities and refining the positive qualities of our mind.

Once we are able to identify the positive qualities or the positive states of mind within ourselves, and we develop a keen interest in developing these positive qualities, we

need to identify what it is that opposes the increase of these positive states of mind. It is the distractions or the discursive mind that hinders us from further developing and increasing our positive states of mind. Thus the technique we use here in the practice of meditation is a technique that helps us to be not affected or influenced by the distracted mind. Firstly we train our mind to separate from the distractions.

The meditation technique we use here is a specific technique to bring about a more focussed and clear state of mind by distancing or withdrawing our mind from external distractions. The way to withdraw our mind from external distractions is, first of all, to make a conscious decision not to be influenced by discursive thoughts and whatever other distractions that may occur, and instead to continuously bring our focus and attention back to the object that we choose to meditate on here, which is our breath. We focus on the breath by placing a hundred percent of our attention upon the breath.

The specific instruction in the teachings is that initially we choose the right measure, the capacity that we have to focus on our breath, and try to maintain that focus. The right measure is determined in accordance with one's own capacity. The specific instruction is that through our experience we will be able to detect what is the right measure of focus to place on the object. Here the object is our breath. We apply that measure from the very outset. It means being free from applying either an intense focus initially and then relaxing it later, or having a relaxed focus initially and trying to intensify that later on in that session. To be free from that at the very outset we try to initially apply whatever measure or intensity we can, and just maintain that in a comfortable manner. That is how it is explained. Thus for the next few minutes, by withdrawing our mind from distractions, we place it upon our breath and focus on it. (*Pause for meditation*).

That is sufficient for now. Just as we have attempted to meditate now and experienced some immediate benefit, it would be worthwhile to adopt a regular meditation practice in our daily life. In that way we will begin to get the long term benefit of meditation. A particular point to keep in mind is that it is unrealistic to initially attempt to have a long duration of meditation or expect to focus for a long period. We will not be able to do that because we lack familiarity with maintaining our focus.

Initially you might find it quite difficult to maintain a significant duration of focus. Because we are beginners it is important that we progress from an initially short duration like a minute. We may just commit ourselves to focus for a minute. If we are able to focus for a minute we can be quite happy and satisfied with that for the time being. We can then increase it up to 2 or 3 minutes, until we reach a point of being able to maintain a little longer duration of focus. But if we begin to notice that we are getting a little wary and tired of the focus and the distractions becomes too much for the mind, then rather than trying to persist it is better to leave our meditation for the time being and come back to it when the mind is a bit more settled. With that process we can definitely begin to make progress.

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

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.3. The way in which one approaches death and is conceived (in the subsequent rebirth)

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.3.2. The mind of death

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.3.2.1. Three types of mind

We will now continue with the text. We have come to the outline of how one experiences death and is reborn in the next life. That outline is subdivided into five. The first subdivision was the causes or conditions of death that we covered in previous sessions. The next subdivision is the state of mind at the time of death.

The state of mind at the time of death is said to be one of three types. It is either a virtuous state of mind, a non-virtuous state of mind or an ethically neutral state of mind. Even in our daily waking experiences our mind is one of these three types. Either it is a virtuous state of mind, a negative state of mind or a neutral state of mind. Just as that is the case in our normal day-to-day existence, at the time of death it is one of these three states of mind that will occur. From our experience we can attest to the fact that when one is more acquainted with a virtuous attitude or state of mind then that is more likely to be experienced. The opposite is also true. If someone is more acquainted with negative attitudes it is more likely that the negative attitudes will be prevalent in their mind.

The states of mind that we are more familiar with are more likely to be prevalent in our mind at the present. This is also true at the time of death. Whatever one is more acquainted with in one's life will be experienced at the time of death. If we wish for a peaceful death then that is something that we need to acquaint ourselves with at the present moment. The preparation for a peaceful or happy death is something that we need to prepare for now. This is where meditation comes in.

The immediate experience of our practice of meditation is that when we have been successfully able to focus on an object without being influenced by distractions such as attachment, anger or other non-virtuous states of mind then, for as long as we are able to remain focused without the distractions influencing us we experience an immediate sense of joy and relief from the negative states of mind. We have a sense of joy and happiness within our mind. Just as we experience that on a temporary basis now, the cumulative experience of our practice of meditation will add up and at the time of our death because of our acquaintance with meditation we will naturally experience a mind free from distractions, free from the influence of attachment and anger and so forth. That is how a person will experience a peaceful death.

The fact that no one can escape death and no one can prevent death is a reality that anyone in his or her right mind will accept. But even though we can't prepare for avoiding death since we have to die, we can prepare for a peaceful death. Dying in a peaceful, joyous state of mind is something that we can prepare for.

It is a fact no one can prevent death. When we look into our religious, historical background we have many great religions and the great teachers who founded these great religions but none of these great masters are present today. Even in our own Buddhist faith, Lord Buddha himself showed the aspect of passing into nirvana, passing away. From our common perception he showed that aspect. This means that the Buddha is not here to be experienced in flesh and bone right now. If death could be prevented by anyone, by any tradition or religion's founder or master, we would be able see them now. But the fact and reality is that it cannot be done.

Even though death cannot be prevented and we cannot prepare for that sort of outcome we can prepare for a peaceful death. That is something within our capacity and the choice lies within ourselves right now. The preparation is the process of practising and acquainting ourselves with meditation where we don't allow our mind to be distracted with external distractions. The more we acquaint ourselves with that, the more we become familiar with that, the more that would be the end result that we experience.

We can explain how the state of mind that is not distracted by negative states of mind becomes the real source of joy and a sense of protection for oneself at the time of one's death, in relation to how we normally view things right now in life. Right now in our present state we have a strong belief that we can rely upon external factors for our joy. We trust in our friendships, our companions and possessions and so forth to give us a certain amount of protection. We trust and rely upon these to a certain degree for our protection. However at the time of death it becomes clear that external factors such as companions, friends or possessions cannot help or protect one going into the death process.

One will reach a point where it may seem that one is completely alone in this process. No one can really assist us. No companions, external factors, means or possessions can actually assist us. Thus, at that moment when we feel completely alone, if we have acquainted ourselves with the practice of meditation earlier in our lives that will become our solace. It becomes more and more evident that the practice of meditation, which includes being kind to others, having generated love, compassion and concern for others, and the accumulation of that good positive mind and the good deeds we have done, is the real solace and real protection for oneself.

One's practise of meditation and of distancing the mind from all distractions and not being influence by negativities will be a real source of joy within oneself. Even if one may be experiencing some physical hardship or difficulty because of the physical deterioration of the body, mentally one will not experience great agony or suffering. There is no added mental suffering on top of the physical suffering. In fact there is a sense of real courage and peace in the mind due to one's practice. That is when there will be a strong confirmation for oneself that the sort of practice we have done during our lives has contributed to being able to bear this and handle it properly. The unique benefit of the practice becomes very

evident at that time. More details of this will be explained a little further on.

What becomes really evident at that crucial moment, at a time when one feels totally by oneself and alone in relation to the external conditions, are the inner qualities one has developed from the practice of what we call Dharma, or the practice one has done in any spiritual tradition or religion. It becomes very evident that the practice one has taken to heart earlier is the real companion, the real protector at that time. In the Buddhist tradition we call this Dharma practice.

In other traditions, whatever terms they may use, those who had developed strong faith in their own saviour, God, will find that reliance upon God is a real solace for their mind and a real protection. It may be hard for us to detect what kind of protection those who do not believe in any kind of religion may develop within their mind to handle that situation. But for those who follow a particular religion and have a strong faith and follow it sincerely the cumulative benefit of their practice becomes really evident at that crucial moment.

An example of a virtuous state of mind is generating faith, and an example of a non-virtuous state of mind is a mind with strong attachment, desire or anger and the like. The text explains that the occurrence of a virtuous or a non-virtuous state of mind can arise either from one's own side or because it is reminded by others. To take an example of a virtuous state of mind: if someone is really acquainted with virtue through their own previous practice they may naturally develop a virtuous state of mind from their own side. However it is described in the teachings of how to care and assist a dying person that they can be reminded of virtue by other means.

We can look at an example of how to assist someone by encouraging them to have a virtuous state of mind. We can take another religious faith as an example. If someone has been sincerely following the Christian faith and thus has a strong faith in God then at that time of their death we can gently remind them not to fear, that God is definitely looking upon them and will definitely protect them as God is actually present and is helping and guiding you. Helping that person to remember God in that way will, because of their familiarity with generating faith in God, remind them of their faith in God. That then becomes a virtuous state of mind that becomes a protection for them to have a peaceful death. Likewise, if someone is Buddhist then to remind them of the Buddha's presence and the Buddha's guidance and so forth becomes the means for a Buddhist to develop strong faith at that time and to be in a virtuous state of mind.

A person develops a negative state of mind by remembering those people or situations that have made them have either strong desire or strong anger previously. They may remember that either by themselves or from whoever may be surrounding them. Sometime when people are sick and in their last stage the people who care for them may not be really patient and may start yelling or not taking good care of them. That can develop agitation in the dying person's mind and negative states of mind such as strong desire or anger may occur. That would be an example of a non-virtuous

state of mind. Thus the advice given in the teachings is to have the most conducive, most peaceful environment possible for the dying person.

The state of mind of a dying person is said to be very crucial in helping to direct them in their process. Thus it is explained in the teachings that regardless of the person's earlier path in their life it is important if one can assist them at the time of death. It is important that one can really muster one's whole energy towards having a virtuous state of mind. That determines one's onward journey. The last stages of one's life are considered to be the most crucial time in one's existence.

Even if someone has not been religious in the earlier part of their life and didn't have any strong beliefs they can change at the time of death. Because of certain situations their mind can start to actually turn to having strong belief and that can be a good point for that person. To have that positive state of mind can really be of assistance through their death process.

I have examples of people not being religious who in the later part of their life found it really helpful and beneficial to recall virtue and by that induce a virtuous state of mind. I have advised people just before experiencing death and I have asked them if they could have a positive mind, a good frame of mind. 'Can you manage to have a good state of mind, a kind state of mind?' They said, 'Yes, I can manage that. I can do that'. Having acknowledged and accepted that and thus induced positive states of mind I was informed later that they had a very peaceful death. That attests to the fact that people who are not religious in the earlier part of their lives can still be helped to have positive or virtuous states of mind at the end state.

Whereas someone who was considered a religious person earlier in their life and may have done some practice and so forth may, at the time of death because of certain conditions or situations arising, have negative states of mind arise. Even if they have been considered quite religious earlier, if at the time of death their mind is not in a virtuous state of mind they may experience anger or fear or anxiety and so forth. That will not be a help for them.

Nevertheless, the practices that we do now can, if we do them sincerely, have some positive effect when we experience pain and suffering now. In line with the Buddhist practice we can use that same approach during the death process when we experience any pain or suffering. We can imagine taking upon the sufferings of others to remind one that one is not alone in experiencing pain. There are many others who are experiencing much more agony, much more pain. To willingly take on the sufferings that one is experiencing on behalf of others, imagining that one is taking the sufferings and pain of all others and it's ripening or experienced upon one self. This is said to be an incredibly powerful practice, which in fact helps one's mind to bear the immediate difficulties and thus brings about a very positive frame of mind. Practise such as this will be a tremendously powerful practice to help endure whatever one is going through and the mind will be much more peaceful and restful.

We have briefly covered the different states of mind that occur at the time of death. The next subject is the type of appearances that occur at the time of death. If you have virtuous states of mind then certain kinds of appearances occur. If in a negative state of mind then a dying person has certain other appearance. We can introduce this in the next session.

Acknowledging the fact that we have to experience death helps us acknowledge that it doesn't serve any real purpose to be fearful of death. Fearing death will not prevent death and will not be any help at the time of death. So, rather than fearing death one can actually prepare one's mind to accept that reality and to try to work with oneself now so that one can focus when one experiences death and place one's mind in a virtuous frame. By practising now and familiarising our mind we can experience death in a calm state of mind. Rather than being fearful, it is much more worthwhile if we can accept that reality and work towards having a more peaceful death.

Before we end the session this evening, we will spend a few minutes in contemplation. This time we focus on the sound of the mantra of Buddha Shakyamuni.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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