
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual it would be good to spend some time for meditation, so for that purpose, we will sit in a comfortable, relaxed posture. Sitting up straight also freshens one's mind.

When we consider the need to practise meditation, we can think along the lines of how it helps to promote good attitudes in our mind. We can see from our own experience that the more we familiarise our mind with good attitudes, the more spontaneously they will arise in our mind stream, thus having a more positive outlook on life. Whereas the more we familiarise our mind with negative attitudes, the more discomfort and problems that will bring us.

When we recognise the advantages of having positive attitudes and the disadvantages of having negative ones, we can then see how the practice of meditation helps us to discern the positive from the negative, and thus cultivate the positive. In that way, the practice of meditation also becomes the means to develop what is called analytical wisdom – the intelligence to know the difference between positive and negative states of mind.

As I regularly emphasise, another reason why we need to practise meditation is that in our present situation, if we are not familiar with the meditation technique, our mind will be prone to negative and discursive thoughts. Our mind will be bombarded with various thoughts that keep it busy. This very busy state of mind becomes a cause for mental turmoil.

Adopting the meditation technique helps to lessen our discursive thoughts, and not be influenced by them. Then we will be able to discern more clearly whether our mind is in a positive frame or not, and what kind of actions we are doing.

Thus while practising meditation helps to settle our mind, the most prominent result of our practice will be the development of a kinder attitude. Through the practice of meditation, as our kind attitude increases, we begin to realise how having a kind attitude towards others benefits us in return. We realise that we are the real beneficiary. The opposite is also true: the more self-concern we have, the more problems it will bring us.

Just as we will begin to notice the positive effects for ourselves of developing a kind attitude as a result of meditation practice, these effects will also become obvious to others. As we become more warm-hearted and extend that to others, the benefits of our meditation practice will also become obvious to others.

To give a contemporary, practical example of the positive effects that a kind-hearted person has on others, we can relate to how we feel when we are in the presence of someone who is a naturally warm-hearted and kind person: what effect does this have on us? On the other hand, when we are with people who are on edge all the time, a bit short-tempered, what effect does that have when we are in their

presence? So we can judge from our own experience the effect of being in the presence of a kind-hearted person.

I personally feel that on a practical level, the positive effect of having a kind heart, a warm heart, is that one is able to have more companions, more friends in one's life. We can again see from the earlier example that, when one is kind and warm-hearted, it naturally draws people to us. People are naturally drawn to such a person and want to be in their company. Even if we don't intentionally seek friends, they will naturally be drawn to us.

On the other hand, if one falls prey to more negative, hostile attitudes, people will slowly begin to shy away. Such a person may even reach a point where they don't seem to have any companions or friends any longer. It may not be so much that other people are intentionally abandoning them, but because of our own negative states of mind one will tend to feel isolated from them. You become more and more self-centred and isolated, to the point where you imagine that no one likes you, no one loves you and no one wants to be your friend. In reality, that may not be true. Nevertheless that becomes an assumption or a belief that such a person would have.

When we consider even our day-to-day life, we can agree on that fact that we all want to be happy; we want to have the best in life. And if we consider it further, we will realise many of the conducive factors that contribute to our well-being come from others. We definitely depend on others, in many ways, even for temporary happiness.

Because a lot of the conditions for our well-being depend upon others, we need to have a good relationship and good companionship with others. Again the main factor in having good relationships with others is our attitude. If we lack a genuine sense of kindness and warm-heartedness, people will naturally start to shy away. It would be hard to have genuine companionship with others if we do not develop those positive attitudes. Thus we must realise that maintaining good companionship and relationships with others, depends on our own attitude.

If we come back to the need to practise meditation, we can summarise it thus: engaging in the practice of meditation helps us to have a clearer mind. With a clear mind, we will be able to develop analytical or discriminative wisdom, the intelligence to discern what is good and what is bad for us. Then we can begin to clearly understand how our happiness or misery depends on our state of mind as well as our actions. Whether we engage in positive or negative actions depends on our attitude or state of mind. Thus the practice of meditation helps us to first develop a clear mind, then a more intelligent mind, enabling us to further enhance positive attitudes such as kindness and warm-heartedness towards others. This is how we can summarise the actual purpose or need for the practice of meditation.

Of course, the quality of kind-heartedness is not only accepted by humans; even animals can appreciate it. We can see how animals immediately respond to someone who is kind to them. Thus even an animal recognises the values of a kind heart.

To give a personal account of this, in the past after a teaching session had ended and I had gone back up to my room, I would go to the kitchen and witness Donyo giving some bread to possums. Donyo mentioned that before he actually handed it over, he would touch their heads with the bread. The possums became so familiar with this that whenever he was about to give them bread, they would already have bent

their heads bent down! *[laughter]* This also goes to show that even an animal knows how to react to get what it wants.

The main point is that we can summarise the purpose of meditation as being a technique to first develop a kind heart, and once that is developed, to try to maintain and increase it further. That is the purpose of meditation. At the same time, it helps us decrease the more self-centred or negative attitudes within our minds.

So, to engage in the practice of meditation, we adopt the appropriate physical posture, which is an upright but relaxed one. Just as we straighten our body and sit in a relaxed posture, likewise we pay attention to the state of our mind. To engage in the proper technique of meditation, we need to intentionally withdraw our mind from all distractions. That means, for the next few minutes, we don't allow our mind to be influenced by any thoughts, positive or negative; we just completely withdraw it from all discursive thoughts and bring our focus inward.

We intentionally withdraw the mind from all distractions and bring it inwards, initially remaining for just a few moments with that inward focus, withdrawing our mind from all other thoughts. Withdrawing the mind in itself means we are bringing our focus more inward. So we will maintain that for a few moments.

Just when we begin to notice that our mind is starting to get distracted by thoughts, at that point we bring our full focus and attention to the meditation object, which in this case is our breath. When we bring our focus or attention on the breath, we keep it there, 100% focused, with what is called a single-pointed focus. Single-pointed focus basically means to be completely aware of the breath itself and not allow the mind to be influenced by other thoughts or ideas, but to constantly reinforce our full attention on the natural inflow and outflow of our breath, being completely aware and observant of that. That is what we will do the next few minutes. *[Pause for meditation]* That should be sufficient for now.

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 can go over a few lines from the text now as we had not had the opportunity to do so in our last few sessions.

The topic that we were covering in the text is the state of mind at the time of death. Basically there are three types of mind that can occur at the time of death. A dying person could have either a virtuous state of mind, a negative state of mind, or an ethically neutral state of mind. In our last sessions, we covered the description of dying with a positive, and then a negative state of mind.

As mentioned previously, to die in a happy, virtuous state of mind is what we can all wish for. We need to understand the explanations given in the text as a means to prepare ourselves for the time of death, which we will each experience. As mentioned in the teachings, the reality is that no one can prevent their own death. However, we can

prepare for *how* we will die, what kind of state of mind we wish to be in at that time.

The next topic in the text is the appearances in relation to the state of mind one has at the time of death. If one dies with a negative state of mind, what are the likely appearances that one will experience? Likewise, for someone dying with a positive state of mind, what are the likely appearances that will occur at that time?

As the text explains, those who have cultivated virtue seem to pass from darkness into light. That is the description given in the text: one has the vision of going to a very luminous place.

As the text further explains, for such a person, as they die, "various pleasant and attractive images appear as though in a dream". They die comfortably; at the time of death, intense feelings of suffering do not arise in their body. The text says, as if in a very pleasant dream, the dying person naturally has comfort and ease as they pass on from this life. Even now in our everyday life, if we pass from darkness into light – if we are in a very dark room and we come into a lighter area – there is a sense of joy, isn't there? There is a sense of relief from that oppressive darkness. Similarly, for the dying person, when the appearance of light occurs, it gives them a sense of joy. As mentioned further in the text, they do not experience intense levels of suffering in their mind.

We emphasise again that the main purpose of what is being described here in the text is to prepare for our own death. As mentioned previously, since we have to die anyway, since we cannot prevent our death, the next best thing we can do is to prepare for a pleasant death. And that depends on how we lead our life now. As the teachings describe, leading an ethically moral and virtuous life now will prepare us to have a pleasant death.

As mentioned earlier, developing a kind, warm-hearted nature is one of the main ways of leading a virtuous life. More specifically, as mentioned in the teachings, leading an ethical life means abstaining from the ten non-virtuous deeds – for example, abstaining from killing or taking another's life, stealing, harsh words, lying, abusive words, and so forth. Intentionally refraining from these negative deeds now will become the ultimate protection for ourselves. Familiarising ourselves with the practice of abstaining from negative deeds and cultivating the virtuous or positive deeds and a kind state of mind become the ultimate protection for us at the time of death. This is how we should understand the preparation for death.

Next the text explains about a person who dies in a non-virtuous state of mind. What appears to someone who dies in a non-virtuous or negative state of mind is the opposite of the earlier situation; they seem to pass from lightness into darkness. As if in a nightmare, many unpleasant images appear to them. Just as there is mental anguish and suffering, they also physically feel uncomfortable. These occurrences happen as a result of a non-virtuous state of mind.

The third situation is dying with an ethically neutral mind. A dying person whose mind is in an ethically neutral state will have neither pain nor pleasure at the time of death. They would just have a blank state of mind, not having the strong sensations of either pleasure or suffering.

As the text then explains, what determines whether a person has a virtuous or a negative state of mind at the time of death mainly depends on what they have been more familiar

with in their life. For someone who has been more familiar with negativity, due to that familiarity, it is most likely that a negative state of mind will dominate the dying person's mind. If a person has been more familiar with virtue and positive attitudes in their life, naturally these would be the more prevalent at the time of death.

The text then goes on to explain that if a person has equally created both positive and negative actions in their life – having done good and bad – in that case, whatever is remembered first in the dying process would dominate. If a negativity is remembered first, that would be the most dominant state of mind, and the dying mind would be in a negative state. On the other hand, if they remember virtue first, the mind would be in a virtuous state. Here the text is referring to the last stages of one's life, or the dying state of mind. In that crucial moment, that very last stage of one's life, whatever state of mind one is in will assist or harm one at the time of death.

What this explanation is again pointing out is that now is the time for us to familiarise ourselves with positive states of mind. That is something we do have control over right now. As mentioned previously, developing a kind attitude takes a bit of effort, yet it is really worthwhile.

As a reminder, we can use verses from prayers such as the prayer of the four immeasurable attitudes: "May all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness. May all beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering". During the course of the day, we can take time to remind ourselves of how wonderful it would be if all beings were to be happy and have all the causes of happiness; and how wonderful it would be if all beings were to be free from suffering and the causes of suffering. Merely recalling that wish is incredibly powerful; if we can try to remind ourselves hundreds of times over, that would be great. If that is not possible, at least if we can recall it several times a day, that would be good.

It doesn't take much time to develop that attitude. Within a few seconds, we can definitely develop the attitude "how wonderful it would be for other beings to be happy", and genuinely try to feel it. The words "all beings" means all living beings, without discrimination. That includes not only our friends and relatives, but also strangers and any enemies we may have, regardless of who they may be. We remind ourselves that everyone, equally – whether friends, strangers or enemies – wants to be happy and do not want to experience any kind of suffering. Whoever they may be, every living creature has exactly the same wish that we have, which is to be happy. Thus generating that altruistic wish within oneself is highly meaningful.

Now the question may be raised, will wishing that for others actually make a difference? Will it actually provide happiness and the causes of happiness to others? Will it remove other's suffering? On a practical level that may not be so. Just wishing others to be happy may not contribute immediately to their happiness. And wishing them to be free from suffering may not immediately contribute to their being free from suffering right away. Nevertheless, by familiarising ourselves with that attitude and further cultivating it, as we progress with our practice and reach the point where we do have the ability to help others, at that time, due to our familiarity of those positive attitudes, we will have no hesitation to provide help. There will be nothing to prevent us helping others. That will come about through familiarity, through generating those attitudes now.

When we really think about helping others, the main way to help anyone would be to help them gain happiness and eliminate suffering. There is no other way that we can really benefit others besides doing that. So, we can see how precious this altruistic attitude is.

The text then explains that the dying person will reach the stage in the death process called the most subtle mind of death, according to the sutra explanation of the Buddha's teachings. In the tantric teaching this mind is called the "clear light" stage. It is a very subtle state of mind that does not naturally occur during our normal waking state. At that point, when the dying person reaches the most subtle state of mind of death, the mind becomes an ethically neutral mind. Regardless of whether it was positive or negative earlier, at that stage it naturally becomes an ethically neutral state of mind.

We will conclude here for the evening, but I'd like to emphasise again, as I regularly do, to really take to heart the great benefit of spending some time every day to practise some meditation. That continuous familiarity with the practice of meditation will eventually bring about really good results for us. When we understand the benefit of meditation, we will see it is in our best interest to put some time aside to meditate.

If we give in to our excuses that we don't have time, we would never really be able to meditate. We must recognise that when we say to ourselves, or others, that we don't have time to meditate, it is really just an excuse. It's not really true, because we always have time to do other things. We have time to sit down and watch a TV show, whatever it may be. No matter how tired we may be from work or whatever, we can always sit down on a couch and relax in front of the TV, right? So, from that time, we can maybe take five minutes for the practice of meditation. Even if it's just five minutes a day, it is worthwhile to be consistent with that five-minute practice of meditation on a daily basis. That will definitely bring some positive results for ourselves in our life.

Before we end the session this evening, we will again spend some time for meditation. This time, as we bring our focus inward, we focus 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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