
The Condensed Lam Rim

ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བརྒྱུག་པ་སྟེ།

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As usual, we can spend some time in meditation. As I usually emphasise, the practice of meditation is really useful and relevant in our daily life.

Meditation has even become quite trendy these days, because everyone seems to be talking about it! However when someone mentions they are going to do meditation, it can still instil some curiosity in others, who may think: 'I wonder what meditation is really about?'

Many people have commented that the mere posture, gestures and facial expressions of Buddha Shakyamuni seem to bring about a very peaceful atmosphere. We can see for ourselves, by just looking at the Buddha, that he does appear to have a very peaceful aspect.

When we sit in a meditative posture and attempt to meditate, we can also experience a measure of calmness and peace in our mind. Even at a physical level, the mannerisms and gestures that we display seem to bring some joy to others, whereas when we display certain other physical gestures and mannerisms, they cause unease in others. That's a fact, isn't it?

Just as this is so in relation to physical gestures and mannerisms, it is also true for the mind. When we adopt certain mindsets or mental attitudes, they can bring joy and peace for others, whereas when we hold certain other attitudes or mindsets, they can bring distress and unease to others. So it is good for us to analyse all of our characteristics and mannerisms to see how they can either benefit or harm others. At the verbal level, for example, certain words and ways of speaking can bring about a sense of joy and happiness in others, whereas when we utter unpleasant speech, it can bring unease, and hurt to others.

When we look into the different aspects of our being and how they relate to ourselves and others, we can see there is a lot to be gained from self-analysis. Having analysed and contemplated our interactions with others, we can definitely conclude that on all three levels – physical, verbal and mental – there are certain actions to be adopted and those to be discarded. On a physical level, gestures and mannerisms that are useful and bring joy and happiness to others are to be adopted, whereas mannerisms and gestures that are harmful to others are to be discarded. Likewise on the verbal level, we need to adopt positive speech and discard negative speech. And on a mental level, it's clear that we need to adopt certain attitudes and discard others.

It becomes clear to us that, regarding actions of our physical body, speech and mind, there are two sets of opposing choices – positive actions to be adopted, and

negative, hurtful actions to be discarded. When we come to this point, we can then further investigate where these choices really come from. We can also investigate the advantages and disadvantages of these choices: which ones seem to have more benefit, and which ones more disadvantages, causing harm?

When we investigate where those choices come from, we will recognise that they stem from the attitudes within our own mind. When the mind is in a joyful and peaceful state, one's physical gestures and mannerisms become quite pleasing; likewise, the words one utters to others will be pleasing. One feels naturally and spontaneously inclined to use pleasing, soothing speech with others, because of the positive attitude in our mind. The reason why we have a positive attitude in our mind is that the mind is in a peaceful, joyful state.

Conversely, when we look at the times when we use rough, unpleasant physical gestures and speech, and have negative thoughts in our mind, that can be traced to having a troubled mind, a mind that is not peaceful. When these negative occurrences happen, if we look into our mind, we will find that it is in a troubled state.

This is not an obscure or subtle point, but something we can all agree upon when we look into ourselves. If we don't pay attention, it may not be obvious, but if we pay attention and investigate our mind, as mentioned earlier, this should become noticeable to us. Through self-analysis and investigation, we can clearly recognise that all the unpleasant gestures and mannerisms of our body, speech and mind come from a mind that is unsettled, troubled and not peaceful. We can notice this for ourselves, particularly at times when we find ourselves uncontrollably saying unpleasant things or showing unpleasant mannerisms that we wouldn't normally consider saying or doing to a loved one, or someone close to us.

When we notice this in ourselves, we can then relate that situation to others. We can use our own uncontrolled state of mind to relate to others when they display unpleasant gestures; we can see that this is because their mind is in a troubled, disturbed state. When we relate to them on that level, we will not take it too personally and get upset with them. Rather, we will recognise that it is because of the other person's troubled mind that they do or say things that are inappropriate or unpleasant. When a person's mind is in a troubled state, it is as if it is in their nature to say or do inappropriate things, and have unpleasant thoughts; it is as if they have no control over what they do or say. By using ourselves as an example, when we consider these points and relate them to others, we can be a little more tolerant and more patient with the other, and we will not get upset and angry with them.

The main point I am emphasising again is that it is essential to try and maintain a joyful and peaceful mind rather than having a troubled mind that is full of worries.

At this point, we may all agree that having a trouble-free, peaceful mind is really desirable, something we would want to have at all times. However the question may now arise: is that possible? Is it possible to maintain a trouble-free, peaceful state of mind? The continual process of investigating and analysing oneself is an appropriate way

to find answers to our questions. Then the possibility of having a trouble-free, peaceful mind definitely becomes evident. As explained in the teachings, the best method for attaining a trouble-free, peaceful state of mind is using the technique of meditation.

Having recognised that meditation is the technique for bringing about a trouble-free, peaceful state of mind, one may then further ask: 'How does meditation work as a technique to bring this about?' To answer this, it is appropriate first to analyse and investigate how the mind becomes troubled in the first place. How does our mind start to become more and more troubled, and more and more anxious, and eventually feel depressed and sad?

As the text explains, it is the distracted mind that leads to a troubled mind. The distracted mind here refers particularly to a mind that is completely obsessed with worldly concerns and sensual pleasures. The more preoccupied the mind becomes with worldly concerns and sensual pleasures, the more troubled it seems. Such a mind is naturally unsettled, because it is as if the mind is running around in every direction, and becomes very weary. That is how the distracted mind becomes the cause for a troubled mind – because it is in an overworked state. And when it is very distracted, it leads to many worries and becomes unsettled which brings about anxiety. If we look into it, no matter how much energy and time we spend in pursuing external things, somehow we never really seem to be satisfied, and that lack of satisfaction brings sadness; a weariness in our mind. With this sense of sadness and weariness, the clarity of the mind is obstructed. That means one will not be clear about one's direction in life and lose one's self-esteem, feeling very down and discouraged. This is the onset of depression in the mind.

So through our investigation, we come to the point of clearly recognising and identifying the cause of our troubled mind, which is the distracted mind. And if we return to the earlier point of how meditation works to bring about a trouble-free and peaceful mind, the next point is identifying the proper technique of meditation. The proper technique involves withdrawing our mind from all distractions, worldly concerns and sensual objects, bringing it inward and placing it upon an internalised object. As soon as the mind settles upon the inner object, it focuses vividly upon that object one hundred per cent, and abides there. At that point, one will begin to experience a real sense of relief from all worries and troubles, and a real sense of joy and happiness in one's mind. One can then identify the possibility of the mind becoming settled and peaceful.

Now we can spend some time applying the meditation technique, readjusting our body into a relaxed, comfortable posture. Likewise, to the best of our ability, we can generate a positive attitude or motivation in our mind. To achieve the benefits of meditation, we must be very clear about the technique, and really try to put our full commitment into our practice over the next few minutes.

We begin by intentionally withdrawing our mind, not allowing it to be influenced by any thoughts or distractions related to the external world; we completely

withdraw the mind from all these thoughts and concerns. So first, we just make an attempt to bring our focus inward, letting go of thoughts, preconceptions and all forms of distractions, and bringing the mind inward. Then, after we have brought our focus inward, in order to maintain that inward focus, we choose an appropriate meditation object, which in this case is the natural inhalation and exhalation of our breath. As we naturally inhale and exhale, we try to maintain a focus on the breath.

We must make a commitment to having a one-hundred-per-cent focus on the breath. That means making sure we are not half-focused, or doing the practice half-heartedly – which means one part of our mind is focused on our breath, and one part is still holding on to other thoughts and ideas that pop up in our mind. Here we must make every attempt not to hold on to any thoughts or ideas that may come up in our mind; rather, we let them go and keep a one-hundred-per-cent focus on the breath itself. As mentioned previously, when we attempt to do that and succeed in keeping our focus for even a short period of time on the breath, we will experience a sense of real relief. It is as if the mind gets a rest from all the worries and troubles that it may have been preoccupied with earlier. Along with that restful feeling, the mind also has a sense of clarity and joy, even though it may be only for a short time. Physically we can also experience a sense of lightness. This is something we can all experience if we apply the technique properly. So now we can spend the next few minutes applying this technique. (*Pause for meditation*)

That should be sufficient for now. Was that maybe too short for you? (*laughter*) As we would all have noticed in doing this short meditation, as far as the technique goes, it not that complicated. It is actually quite simple. It is a matter of applying the technique and finding some time to do the meditation.

Now, if we experienced even a small degree of relief and benefit during our short meditation session just now, then the long-term result of meditation will definitely be evident if we engaged in the practice regularly. If we don't apply meditation practice regularly, we will not derive the benefit of meditation. So I regularly encourage people to find some time every day to do even a few minutes of meditation – whenever that may be – and not to find excuses by saying there is no time. We can all find a few minutes to do meditation practice on a regular basis. If we were to apply it on a regular basis, that consistent practice would add up and have a long-term positive effect later on in our lives. That is definitely possible.

As we have a gathering of like-minded people here – those we can consider as spiritual friends, or spiritual brothers and sisters – it is worthwhile for us to interact with each other and try to share each other's experiences and queries, as we are all attempting to do the same practice. We each have our own experiences, doubts and questions, so when we interact with others and talk about these experiences, it becomes a useful way to further enhance our practice and to clear any doubts we may have. Over a cup of tea or whenever we are sitting

together, we can just exchange and share whatever thoughts we have about our practice. Sometimes one may have made an attempt to meditate, but perhaps there were some points about the technique one may have missed. When one speaks with someone else with more experience, they can help to throw light on how to overcome that, perhaps by identifying some simple errors in one's practice. In that way, we can help each other, and it becomes a meaningful, useful way of learning and further enhancing our technique.

In such gatherings with like-minded people, it is much more worthwhile to exchange points about meditation techniques and practice and so forth, than talk about worldly concerns, which will only activate more negative states of mind within one; that is not really useful. When we come out of a meditation session like this, most of us will naturally be quite calm and relaxed. In that relaxed and calm atmosphere, when we talk about our practice and share points about our practice, communication also becomes much easier, more useful, and thus helps clear the mind further. Whereas, if we talk about worldly things this will activate the delusions in our mind, which becomes a stimulus for the mind to become agitated. If we are in a calm state of mind, when we exchange words with others, we seem to be able to access their positive aspects. But if our own mind is quite agitated and disturbed when we talk with others, it seems that what we get more agitation and more trouble from them. This is a very important point.

Beyond the spiritual aspect of talking about meditation and so forth, communicating and interacting with others in a calm manner seems to create a more joyful atmosphere, even in a worldly context. In a family, it becomes evident that when the parents have calm and pleasant interactions, the children around them also feel the positive effect, and naturally feel very joyful and comfortable around the parents, and feel drawn to them. This is something we have all experienced in our lives, not something conjured up as a fantasy. It is true, isn't it? Even on that level, it is good to understand how having a calm mind has a positive effect. When one has made the attempt to maintain a joyful, peaceful, happy state of mind, the positive effect permeates one's relationship wherever one goes.

As it seems quite a chilly evening, we might conclude our session here. Perhaps I have reminded you of the cold weather and you have started feeling it again! (*laughter*) You might have just then felt: 'I wish that it was not mentioned, as I had forgotten about it.' This seems to happen when someone comments about the cold weather.

In relation to that, earlier when I mentioned how cold it was to someone who had cooked lunch for me, her response was that it was indeed quite cold outside, but still warm inside. That made me feel that, yes, it's true, it's not that cold inside! (*laughter*) So when we check our attitude, it seems that it can be easily influenced, can't it? Even just a change of words can influence us to have a different way of looking at things. Sometimes though, we need to be careful, because even if we have a positive attitude, a slight change can turn it into a negative mind.

Before we conclude for the evening, we can again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time, as we follow the same technique of making the commitment to withdraw our focus from external objects and concerns and bringing our focus inward, this time we will focus on the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's name. So just keep the mind focused on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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