
The Condensed Lam Rim

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We can spend some time for meditation. We seem to talk about meditation every time we meet here! However it may be relevant to our life. Actually meditation means to familiarise the mind with good habits or attitudes. In particular, it serves as a means for us to gain control over the mind: that is one of the particular features of meditation.

When we refer to one's mind and one's physical body as 'my mind' and 'my body', the inference is that they are owned by oneself. Indeed one is the owner and should have ownership and control over one's own body and mind. However in our present situation, because of the lack of practice in meditation, we seem to be under the control of our mind rather than the other way round.

We can take the example of using our intellect for doing positive things. It requires a lot of effort, time and energy to acquaint ourselves with doing positive things. Leaving aside the spiritual context, even within a worldly context, we all know that it takes many years to learn useful skills, good habits, and so forth. What prevents us from being readily in a positive frame of mind to do positive things is the fact that we are under the control of the mind, which in turn is under the control of the delusions.

It is only when this situation is reversed – where we have control over the mind to the point that it is subdued and not influenced by delusions – will we experience a genuine sense of real happiness in our mind. Thus the great Buddha Shakyamuni had advised us that 'A subdued mind is a happy mind'.

For example, when we are under the influence of a negative state of mind such as anger, we become so dominated by anger that it brings a lot of turmoil within our mind. The more intense the anger, the less control we have over what say and do. We can see that those who are completely dominated by anger don't have any control over their actions.

If we reflect on this, then when we see someone acting out of anger, we can relate to their situation as someone who has lost control over themselves. This can help us to not entirely blame that person, with the understanding that they are dominated by the negative mind of anger. In this way, we can bring a deeper understanding to the other person's situation.

While a mind dominated by anger is a troubled mind, for someone whose mind is not dominated by anger, they will experience real peace and happiness. So a person who is prone to anger might reverse their situation and find a way of not being completely influenced by anger, through focusing on an object that would not cause anger

to arise in the mind. By keeping one's full attention and focus on that object, in that instant one would be able to distance one's mind from anger. As a result, one would experience genuine relief and natural calmness within our mind. That sounds like a really great technique, doesn't it?

Someone who is irritable and easily influenced by anger needs such a technique, which involves familiarising the mind with an object that does not cause anger to arise: an object that gives rise to the opposite of anger, a state of non-anger. The more the person familiarises themselves with such an object, the less opportunity there will be for anger to arise in the mind. That is how one can slowly overcome the dominance of anger in the mind.

The same is also true for overcoming any negative state of mind. As we just mentioned, the technique involves familiarising and focusing the mind on an object that is opposed to the negative state of mind. The more we familiarise ourselves with focusing on this object, the less intense will be that negative state of mind. As we slowly familiarise ourselves with that object, we will naturally become less prone to the influence of the negative mind.

When we actually put this meditation technique into practice, we will gain the positive results and develop our intelligence. The Buddhist term 'analytical wisdom' refers to a particular intelligence that is able to discern positive states of mind from negative ones. When one has developed that intelligence to a level where one is able to detect the positive and negative states of mind within oneself, this analytical wisdom will serve as the main agent to continually distinguish between the positive and the negative. Whenever negative states of mind arise, one will notice them and will not allow oneself to be influenced by them. At the same time, one will also slowly increase the positive attitudes within the mind.

Regarding the practice of meditation, initially it may not be possible for us to spend long periods of time meditating, as one is not yet familiar with the practice. However, if we were to spend some time regularly doing the practice, gradually we would become more familiar with it. This is how meditation works, through a gradual process. As we become more familiar with the proper technique of meditation, we will notice that it will start to relieve the unease in our mind.

We may have noticed this for ourselves: without any immediate apparent cause, we may experience a sense of unease in the mind. Somehow things just don't seem to be right. We cannot really pinpoint anything wrong; we just feel a bit overwhelmed, a bit hopeless, or feel a general sense of unease in the mind. If that feeling of unease increases, it will bring about an unsettled, even depressed, state of mind. However, by using the proper technique of meditation, we can begin to release that sense of unease, and start to feel more joy and comfort in the mind.

It is good to familiarise ourselves with one meditation technique, and as we gain experience from properly putting that one technique into practice, we can apply that approach to other meditation techniques. There may be many meditation techniques, but it is good to gain some familiarity and experience from practising just one

form of meditation to begin with; then we can relate to all other forms of practice.

As we become more familiar with meditating, we will begin to experience the positive result of regular practice – the mind will start to feel at ease and experience some joy. That is bound to happen. There's no choice but for a peaceful and joyous feeling to occur in one's mind as a result of the practice of meditation. That is because the very practice of meditation serves as a remedy for overcoming a disturbed, distracted mind. Disturbances arise in the mind when it is completely distracted and out of control. The technique of meditation involves withdrawing one's mind from distractions and maintaining an inner focus. That inner focus becomes the remedy for overcoming distractions, and thus the disturbances resulting from those distractions. When we have applied the appropriate remedy for overcoming the disturbances in our mind, as a natural result, what takes place is a sense of real ease and joy, and also a clarity: the mind starts to become very clear in its focus and so forth.

The reason we are explaining how meditation works and how it benefits our mind is so that those who are interested in meditation will start to develop a real sense of trust in the practice. Normally we take it for granted that the practice of meditation will benefit us, but if we don't know how it benefits us, our determination to practise meditation may not be that strong. Whereas if you actually understand how meditation works to overcome disturbances and bring about real joy and peace in the mind, the benefits will become very clear: you will no longer just assume that the practice of meditation is of benefit. One will be able to know through one's own analysis, that this is true, that it's actually a fact. Knowing why the practice of meditation can benefit us, it is up to us whether we apply it or not. At least we would not be lacking the knowledge of its benefits. But putting it into practice depends on our own determination.

Analysing how meditation practice benefits us also serves as the means to increase our intelligence, which can then be used for many other purposes. This is because such an analysis gives us knowledge of how the mind works. By investigating how the technique of meditation works, we are finding out how the mind itself works. When we begin to understand how our mind works, that becomes a good basis for understanding many other things; that knowledge can be used in many other practical applications. So there is benefit in analysing and really knowing the mind. Based on that analysis, when one engages in the practice, the experience we get from the practice will further increase our knowledge, intelligence and wisdom.

The intelligence that we gain from this analysis is an intelligence based on valid reasoning – not just assumptions, and thus is very firm and stable. When we analyse how the mind works, we are able to detect certain attitudes that are detrimental to our wellbeing and harmful to us, and there are certain positive attitudes that benefit us. When we are able to discern that from our own investigation and analysis, the findings from that investigation become sound proof for us. Then we can become our own advisors. Normally we have to seek

others' advice about doing certain things and avoiding certain other things in our lives. But if we can start using our own intelligence, evidence and reasoning, we will be able to advise ourselves about what attitudes to maintain and cultivate, and what attitudes to discard. When we are able to discern these points and advise ourselves, that will become a sound basis for improving ourselves, and for transformation to take place. This knowledge will help us not only during our meditation practice, but will also be of benefit outside of our formal practice.

Now we can spend some time in the actual practise of meditation. Let us sit in a relaxed, appropriate physical posture. Then to the best of our ability, we can also adopt a positive frame of mind, by generating a positive motivation. The highest form of motivation we can develop in a simple way is this: 'In order to assist and benefit other beings, first I need to subdue my own mind. Thus, for the ultimate purpose of benefiting others, I will now engage in the practice of meditation, as a means to bring a real sense of joy and peace within myself'.

Based on this positive motivation, we then completely refrain from engaging in the normal thoughts and distractions that occur in our mind. We try to withdraw the mind from all external distractions. Even though we may not be physically engaged with external distractions, the appearance of thoughts relating to those distractions may occur in our mind. So we do not to allow our mind to be influenced by the appearance of the various forms of distraction. We withdraw our mind by making the commitment to focus on the chosen object for the duration of our meditation: to keep our mind completely focused on that. We do not give our mind the opportunity to be influenced by any other thoughts, in the form of distractions. In this way we keep our entire focus on the meditation object.

The actual technique involves keeping a single-pointed focus on the chosen object, which here is the breath. We try to bring the appearance of the breath to our mind, and in conjunction with our actual physical breathing, we focus on the image of the breath that appears to our mind, and single pointedly keep our entire focus on that, not allowing any other appearance to take place in the mind, but rather constantly reminding oneself to bring the image of one's own breath to mind, and just maintaining that for the next few minutes. [*Pause for meditation*]

That is sufficient for now. As one would have just experienced the temporary benefits of the practice of meditation, it would be good to likewise apply it in one's daily life – every day, to find some time for meditation. That would be good wouldn't it?

Nevertheless there may be some who, because of some initial good experience, may become overzealous and think because they got some benefit from meditation, they will devote their entire life to just doing meditation, and then give up their job. In fact I will relate an incident of someone who sought my advice about whether to commit to a three-year retreat doing meditation, or whether they should take up a good job opportunity. My advice was: 'Probably at the moment, it is better that you consider taking on that job'. Then the person commented:

'Perhaps I might die before I take the job?'. In response I said: 'Well if that is the way you are thinking, then by all means doing a retreat may be very good. It has been wrong for me to advise you otherwise'.

However I don't know what went wrong with his plan to practise meditation, but after some time, he was in the situation where he neither had the good job nor the practice of meditation. He was left in a situation where he lacked both. That particular individual latter made this comment: 'Perhaps it would have been best to have listened to your advice about taking that job opportunity!'

My advice was based on a practical approach to life. The reality of the situation, particularly in the west, we need to have financial stability and maintain our livelihood. Because we are not familiar with the practices, trying to completely devote our time and energy to the practice of meditation may not be practical. Thus my advice was based on a practical approach: maintain some regularity in the practice of meditation – do not neglect doing it regularly, but make some time for it – while at the same time maintain one's job to support one's way of life. That combination is what I feel to be a practical approach.

In imparting my advice to others in such a manner, there might be some who may think that the Geshe's advice not to spend one's entire time in meditation and practices is inappropriate. However, having observed the situation, particularly for a layperson the practical conditions for devoting one's entire time to the practice of Dharma are difficult to achieve. If the conditions and circumstances were easy to achieve, then by all means, that would be a good thing. However, the reality is that in a lay life, having all the right conditions and circumstances for devoting one's entire time to the practice of Dharma is difficult to achieve. Based on that reality, my intention is to give practical advice.

Of course for ordained persons, the commitment to become ordained brings a responsibility to devote one's time and energy to the practice of Dharma. Whether we are able to or not, that is something we must aim for.

My advice for practising Dharma to those in the lay community who are in a committed relationship is for the partners to practise a real sense of generosity, a real sense of compassion for each other. Based on this compassionate attitude for each other, each partner can extend help at times of need; extend their concern, time and energy to each other. When one can extend that help wholeheartedly, that becomes a real practice of Dharma. This means having a good relationship, avoiding a sense of competitiveness or jealousy, and avoiding feeling anger or hatred towards each other. When these negative states of mind are avoided in relation to each other, the relationship becomes a genuinely good one based on a mutual sense of concern, caring, nurturing and compassion. These attitudes become the basis for a peaceful life.

When your relationship with the other is harmonious, that is the basis for having a happy life, because happiness does not come from external things – rather happiness is developed from within oneself. When one has good communication and good interactions with the

other, that is how a genuine sense of happiness can develop in relation to living with someone else. That also becomes a Dharma practice – practising compassion, and practising the avoidance of jealousy, anger, competitiveness. These are definitely virtuous attitudes, so they are real Dharma practice for the lay community. This practice then becomes the basis for gradually developing further qualities and virtues in one's mind – based on what is manageable now.

When others such as one's parents see the result of this practice of having a good relationship with others around one by showing compassion, genuine concern and so forth, they will have no hesitation in supporting you to pursue Dharma practice. Particularly if the parents come from a different religious tradition, there will be no objection when their child chooses another religion and wants to become Buddhist.

We are running out of time for this evening's session, but we could have a short time for questions if there are any. You may raise your hands if you have any questions.

Question: You talked about anger and using the opposite of anger to balance anger. What is the opposite of desire if we were to overcome desire?

Answer: As explained in the teachings, the meditation object to focus on is the unattractive features of the object of strong attachment. Focusing on those unattractive aspects of the object will then reduce desire. To reduce desire for or attachment to an object you are very attracted to, one focuses on the unattractive features of the object.

If you focus on an object that does not cause desire or anger in your mind, a neutral object for example, you don't feel desire in your mind, because your mind is distracted from the object of desire. In that case, a neutral object is also appropriate.

Just as the more you focus on an object that does not cause desire in your mind, the less desire you experience, then the more you focus on the on the unattractive aspects of the object [of desire], the less desire will arise in the mind. Does that make sense?

That was a very good question. It shows that you have actually thought about this point and taken it into consideration. This is what I mentioned earlier about using one's intelligence in the right way. When one gets one point right, then one uses that intelligence in a similar way to find out other points as well. That would be a good way to use one's intelligence.

When I say that it is a good question, I also imply that it is a question that does not give me difficulties in answering! So if there is no further question, we can conclude for the evening. Before we conclude for the evening, we will again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time, as we sit in a relaxed and appropriate posture for meditation, the object that we focus on now is the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. So withdrawing the mind from all distractions, we keep focused on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA
Edited Version
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