
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual, it would be good to spend some time in meditation. So for that purpose, sit in a comfortable and relaxed posture.

It is good to remind ourselves of the importance of applying meditation in daily life. If we look into the different situations we face daily, we may find there are certain times when the mind is in a heightened, excited state. Then there may be other times when we feel very low. We need to strive to find a balance between these two undesirable states of mind.

Those more inclined to find themselves with an excited, heightened state of mind will have the expectation that things should always go well, according to their wishes. Because of that expectation, coupled with that excited state of mind, when the slightest thing goes wrong, it is a blow to them; they feel completely shattered and distressed. The stressed feeling comes from having an unrealistic state of mind, always expecting things to go according to their expectations.

At the other extreme are those who tend to feel low and have an attitude of not being able to achieve anything. This attitude will prevent them from engaging in activities, which then brings mental discomfort, low self-esteem, and so forth. If one could adopt a position between these two extremes – not being prone to feeling either too high or too low – one would experience a clear state of mind, free from extremes. This clear, bright state of mind would be really useful. The point being made here is that neither extreme is helpful to us and meditation is a technique to help us bring down an excited state of mind or uplift the mind when it is feeling too low and too down.

Some may question my point that having a heightened state of mind is not good. The heightened state of mind I am relating to here is a mind that brings a feeling of being invincible, an attitude that one can do anything and that everything will be manageable. If one sets such high standards and one does not have the capacity to match them, then that is where the problem arises. If one has the capacity, physically and otherwise, to meet such high standards, there is no problem. But a problem will arise when we set high standards for ourselves but do not have the capacity to match them.

From our own experience, we may notice that when we feel invincible and 'on top of the world' and able to manage everything, that unrealistic approach can cause problems if we maintain this attitude for too long. One may face difficulties because one's expectations are unrealistic. At the other extreme, when we feel low and

feel we cannot manage or do anything, then that again is an uncomfortable state, because it hinders us when we try to do anything constructive. Both states bring us trouble.

If we reflect on these points, we will notice that these extreme states of mind are obstacles to achieving what we really wish for – a more stable and contented life. These states of mind destroy our peace and happiness. If we further consider the correlation between these two extreme states of mind and our attitudes, we will realise that holding on to certain wrong attitudes is what leads us to either a heightened state of mind or a depressed, low state of mind. And our attitudes are none other than the thoughts we create within our own mind, so we have the capacity to change our attitude from an inappropriate one to a more positive one.

Coming back to the earlier point, the technique of meditation is the best technique for cultivating a positive attitude, so meditation is important in our daily lives. We need to periodically check and look into what kind of attitudes we are more prone to. It is essential that we do this on a daily basis, prior to engaging in the formal practice of meditation or even in our worldly activities.

Because our attitude precedes any activity we do, it is essential that we first look into the kind of attitudes we have. This self-analysis will allow us to identify whether an inappropriate or improper attitude is prevalent in the mind. Then we can try to slowly acquaint ourselves with positive attitudes – those that oppose the negative or inappropriate attitudes – and cultivate them. As our mind becomes more focused and clear through the regular practice of meditation, it will allow our positive attitudes to further increase; the more we acquaint ourselves with those positive attitudes, the less potent will be the negative or improper attitudes within us.

So by doing self-analysis, we naturally become our own advisor. When the Buddha said, "One is one's own saviour and one's own protector", that is the point he was making. More specifically, by doing self-analysis, we can detect certain defects or improper attitudes within us. This becomes a real source of knowledge for us; we will learn great lessons from that process.

When we acknowledge our own defects, that recognition is much more acceptable to us than having someone else point out our faults or defects. When someone else points out a defect or fault in us, we might get angry. That is not very useful: we will not learn very much from that! The earlier great Kadampa masters mentioned that one should stand up as a witness to oneself: one should establish one's own witness within one's own mind. This means that we should be able to judge whether what we are doing is appropriate or inappropriate, rather than someone else, which is harder for us to accept. If we can establish the witness within our own mind, judging our own actions, then we can immediately warn ourselves that certain actions or behaviour patterns are inappropriate. Then, because no-one else has had to remind us, overcoming that behaviour is manageable, and we can definitely avert that action and act properly.

Otherwise, we have to depend upon others, which it is not reliable. As with all worldly life, someone who likes

you may praise you just because they like you, and if they don't like you, they might criticise you. So that person's praise does not depend on whether your actions are proper or not, but whether they like you or not.

Thus self-analysis, checking one's own mind, is the best lesson we can learn. When we are able to establish that 'self-witness' within us, wherever we go we can go with a sense of confidence, because we are not reliant on what others say; we are able to withstand whatever others say and not get upset if we know that it is not based on the truth. That will always be a solace, a cause for feeling contented and happy within oneself.

Having mentioned the importance of the practice of meditation, we can now spend some time applying it. Please sit in an upright, relaxed posture. According to the traditional instructions for meditation posture, the way one places one's hands in the meditative gesture is significant. One need not think one *has* to do this, but there seems to be some significance in placing them in this gesture, if it is manageable.

As we position ourselves in this upright posture, it is also important to freshen the mind, to have a clear mind, particularly for the practice of meditation. It is important to withdraw our mind from all distractions, because normally we allow our mind to go in every direction, following every thought that arises. However here, for the purpose of meditation, we must try to completely withdraw our mind from all preoccupations and thoughts, and try to keep it focused inward. That is really important.

Then, as we bring our focus inward to the object we use here, which is our own breath, we direct our full attention to it and try to maintain that focus for the next few minutes, keeping our full attention on the natural inflow and outflow of our breath. (*Pause for meditation*)

That is sufficient for now, so we will go on to the text.

Just as we have attempted now during this short meditation practice, we can apply a similar practice in our daily lives. Our acquaintance with the practice will gradually help to bring about a clearer, more joyous, content state of mind. The significance of having a clear mind coupled with a joyous mind is that we would begin to feel that things generally are OK, they are manageable, regardless of the external situation. The external situation may not be that great, but due to our attitude, we would feel quite content and joyous.

Otherwise, if our mind is not very clear and we are constantly troubled and worried, that attitude will lend itself to us feeling more and more hopeless and uncomfortable. Even if things are relatively OK externally, because of our attitude, we would turn the situation around, and see the environment as being unpleasant. Thus, regardless of the external situation and environment, if we can maintain a happy, clear and joyous mind, that will definitely be useful and will contribute to our well being.

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)

4.2.2.1.2.2.1.2.3.5. How one takes rebirth

Now we now come to the heading 'How one takes rebirth', which is a subdivision from an earlier category.

We have already covered the earlier topics about the mind at the time of death: the appearances the mind has at that time; what state of mind one may have at the time of death, either virtuous or non-virtuous or neutral; and from which part of the body heat gathers as death occurs, and the significance of this. We have also covered the points of how one assumes the intermediate state body when the actual death takes place, and the actual intermediate state body and what that is. Having explained all of this, we now come to the explanation of how, after having passed through the intermediate state, one actually takes rebirth.

What has been explained so far is the intermediate state being. What takes place now is that, once one leaves this immediate state of existence, one then connects to the next life. As explained in the text, if an intermediate state being is to be reborn in a womb, it misperceives its father's semen and its mother's blood as its parents lying together – even though they are not actually together at this moment, it sees the illusion of them lying together.

Then the text quotes from another treatise called the *Abhidharma*, which explains that what the intermediate state being sees is actually the parents in union or lying together; whereas according to the other earlier explanation, that being only has an illusion of the parents lying together – even though the parents may not actually be lying together – and thus develops an attachment towards them. The main point here, by the way, is that an attachment is developed towards the parents.

As explained further in the text:

If that being is to be born female, it turns away from the woman and desires the man, wanting to lie with him. If it is to be born a male, it turns away from the man and desires the woman, wanting to lie with her. Having conceived such a desire, the intermediate state being draws closer and closer to either the man or woman, eventually arriving at a point where it cannot see any part of their body, except for their genitals. It then gets angry at this sight.

What has just been explained in the text is the process of how the intermediate state is born, just prior to the time of conception, and the vision that this intermediate state being has. It sees the parents in sexual union and, if it is to be born female, it wants to keep a distance from the woman and desires to be with the man. This is the immediate cause for it to be born as a woman. If it is to be born as a man, it wants to keep a distance from the man and desires to be in union with the woman. It is that desire that leads that the intermediate state being to

approach the woman and man lying together. However, when it gets closer, the whole body that it saw earlier starts to disappear and it only sees the genitals. This causes the intermediate state being to become upset and angry. Then as the text explains, it dies from the intermediate state and takes rebirth.

So desire, coupled with the anger afterwards, become the cause for the intermediate state being to depart or die from that state and be reborn at the time of conception. This is how the intermediate state being makes the connection to its next life.

Then the text explains at what point one actually makes the connection to the next rebirth:

After the mother and the father have generated intense desire, gelatinous semen is emitted. Drops of semen and blood invariably issue forth from the two of them, mixing within the mother's reproductive tract, and congealing like the skin on top of boiled milk that has been allowed to cool. At this point, the intermediate state being ends, and the fundamental consciousness then enters the congealed mass.

According to the explanation in the text, this is the actual moment of conception – when the actual consciousness enters the mixture of the father's semen and the mother's egg or blood. When this mixture is at a certain point and has the consistency of the skin on boiled milk, this is when the consciousness actually enters the mother's womb. One should understand that the end of the earlier intermediate state being and the point when the consciousness actually enters the womb is when the two substances, semen and blood (or egg) are actually mixing: it is thus *after* the sexual act, not when the parents are lying together. This is why the intermediate state being has a vision of the parents lying together when they are actually not lying together. The actual entering of the consciousness occurs *after* the sexual act, when the two substance congeal. This shows that the consciousness is a very powerful entity, because it is only when the consciousness enters that congealed mass that it becomes potent enough to be even noticed when pregnancy tests are done and so forth, after the mother suspects she is pregnant. Before that, the substances may be in the womb, but this is not sufficient for embryonic development, and that is because the consciousness has not entered the womb yet. Whereas the moment the consciousness enters the mass, at that point it is able to sustain life.

What should be noted here is that while pregnancy tests cannot detect the consciousness or mind, they can detect whether the mother is pregnant and there is a child in the womb. Although the consciousness cannot be seen, the powerful effect of the consciousness entering the mother's womb can be detected: to be able to state with certainty that the mother is pregnant depends on the consciousness entering the womb. When the consciousness enters the womb, somehow the power of that consciousness makes that mass in the mother's womb able to be detected as a life form. If we think about it, then that shows the power of the consciousness, the power of the mind.

From the moment the consciousness enters that congealed mixture in the mother's womb – the combination of the two substances of the semen from the father, and the egg (what is called blood in the text) from the mother – this then becomes the substantial cause for all the faculties, such as the five senses, to be developed within that foetus. Of course, if we go further into the causes, we can talk about karma. However the immediate or substantial cause for the five sense faculties is that mixture, plus the consciousness. When we think about our condition right now – a body that has the full five sense faculties and the full capacity to do things and so forth – this has come about as a result of the consciousness entering the mother's womb, into the mixture of sperm and egg. When you think about it, it is quite amazing that although the consciousness itself is not a physical entity, it has the power to develop us on the physical level to be who we are now. That is leaving aside the explanation of karma, and is just from the point of view of the consciousness.

As His Holiness the Dalai Lama often comments in his teachings, when we think about the features of a human being, it is quite extraordinary how a nose is a certain shape and with a certain function, how the eyes develop, and so forth. If you think only in terms of the consciousness, the fact that an entity which itself doesn't have any shape, colour or form has the ability to produce such an intricate mechanism – just to think of it from this point of view is quite amazing! Of course, what lies behind the consciousness are the previous karmic imprints from previous lifetimes, so it is this combination that produces us as a human with a complex physical body.

What is further described in the teachings is that, at the time of mixing, the substances from both the father and the mother have to be free from any defects and faults. If the semen or egg are faulty, that does not become a substantial or suitable condition for the consciousness to enter. Even modern clinical investigations have find that certain defects in either the egg or the semen can prevent conception.

As the text further explains:

The moment after the consciousness has entered the congealed mass is the point called 'rebirth'. Those who accept the idea of a fundamental consciousness explain this consciousness as being the fundamental consciousness. However, those who do not accept a fundamental consciousness assert that this is the point when the mental consciousness takes rebirth.

This is how the higher Buddhist system of tenets explains it: what we call the mental consciousness enters the mother's womb and takes rebirth.

The point being made here is that when the mixture of substances from the father's and mother's side has reached a certain potency or state, that is when the mind as we know it enters the mother's womb.

The fact that our consciousness begins from the time of conception is something we can accept, even from a conventional point of view. We, as a life form, began in our mother's womb at conception. That is as far as we can

go back and is what we accept as the beginning of this human life.

Now the question arises that if that is where our consciousness began as we know it in this life, what could have caused the consciousness in the mother's womb at the time of conception? As everything has to have its preceding cause, what would be the cause of that consciousness? The teachings assert that there has been a previous life, a previous existence. We can reason for ourselves by a process of elimination. First, the consciousness at the time of conception could not have been caused by our parents. As explained in the teachings, gross matter cannot be the cause for the consciousness itself; the cause of any moment of consciousness has to be a pre-existing moment of consciousness. So that has to be established first.

Given that the cause of any moment of consciousness has to be a preceding moment of consciousness, the question arises, what could be the cause of the consciousness at the time of conception? If we were to assume that it was the consciousness of either or both of the parents, that would be absurd, because as the child grows up, he or she is clearly has a nature and characteristics that are completely different from the parents – the child's intelligence, thinking processes, and so on are completely distinct and separate. So it is clear that the parents' individual consciousnesses couldn't be the cause for the child's consciousness at the time of conception. When that is eliminated as a possibility, the preceding moment of consciousness could only be something that existed prior to the time of conception. That is where it can feasibly be traced back to a previous existence, a previous life. That is how, according to the Buddhist texts, the existence of a past life is established.

So when one comes to fully understand and accept that it is one aspect of the clarity of the mind of the consciousness from a previous life that becomes the substantial cause for the consciousness at the time of conception, then when one realises that then it is said that one gets the accurate understanding or realisation of the existence of a past life. Through analysis and logical reasoning, a past life and future lives are established in the Buddha's teachings. Thinking about these points becomes a useful way for us to generate an acceptance of past and future lives.

Going back to the point about the parents' own consciousnesses not being a substantial cause for the consciousness at the time of conception, we can also look at the point of view of how, when parents have many children, if the consciousnesses of these children were actually caused by the parents' consciousnesses, we would have to assume that all the children would have to have the same way of thinking, same mannerisms, same attitudes and so forth. But clearly we can see that when parents have even only two children, the two children can have completely different attitudes, ways of thinking, mannerisms and so forth.

This is clear, isn't it, not only for humans but for animals. We find, for example, that when a cat has kittens, any two kittens will not be exactly the same. They have some differences, even if they look and appear the same. Some

pet owners have told me that it's amazing to observe how, even as kittens, each one has a completely different attitude. One kitten may be a little bit more inclined to be more loving, whereas the other one may be more inclined to be more obnoxious or naughty. So we can see that there are differences!

As explained in the teachings, as far as our physical body is concerned, the substantial cause is the blood and semen or sperm of the parents. As far as the physical appearance is concerned, we may look similar to either of our parents, but when it comes to the mind or consciousness, if the substantial cause were to be a parent's mind or consciousness, it would have to be exactly the same. But it is clearly not the same – in fact it can be quite different.

As His Holiness the Dalai Lama has also mentioned in teachings, for those who believe in a creator God, they would explain that it is God who created us. So the beginning or cause for humans is a God. As His Holiness says, having that belief has its own weight and is also a quite powerful way of thinking. His Holiness has explained it in this way out of great respect and reflection. Isn't there some description [in the Bible] of how God created man and woman or humans in seven days? Six days and one day of rest! I had heard seven days, but in any case that explanation seems quite good – six days of work and one day of rest. If God needed a holiday, then we definitely need a holiday too!

Before we conclude for the evening, we can spend a few minutes in meditation. This time, as we withdraw our mind from all distractions and bring it inward, we focus on the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra.

Question: How can a hermaphrodite or neuter take rebirth?

Answer: The specifics of that type of birth have not been classified. Nevertheless, what has been explained so far is mainly in accordance with being born as a human; that is the description that has been given of the process of transition from the intermediate state to being reborn as a human. Maybe that was just an example, but this explanation is not exclusive.

Of course, as you say, there are incidents of those being with physical characteristics of both sexes and some who don't have those of either sex. Apparently that is something that even happens in this time and age too. These examples are explained in the teachings in a different context.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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