
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual it would be good to maybe spend some time in meditation. To do that we sit in an upright, relaxed posture. The main purpose for practising meditation is to develop the technique of protecting one's own mind. It needs to be protected from the influence of negative states of mind. Negative states of mind can also be referred to as the disturbing conceptual thoughts that occur in the mind. When we allow our mind to be influenced by disturbing conceptual thoughts it becomes disturbed rather than being in a peaceful and calm state. Disturbing conceptual thoughts agitate the mind and thus disturb it. In order to be free from a disturbed state of mind we need to protect our mind from disturbing conceptual thoughts.

As a consequence of a disturbed state of mind we will also experience ill effects to our health. We can see that when the mind is agitated and disturbed we immediately feel some tension within our body. It seems that when the mind is in a prolonged, disturbed state that also causes ill health within our bodies. As much as we wish for a peaceful, happy and calm mind we also wish for good health. That is another reason why we need to protect the mind.

When we protect our mind from disturbing conceptual thoughts then, for as long as we apply the technique of protecting our mind, we are simultaneously protecting the joy in our mind. As a result of protecting our mind from disturbing conceptual thoughts we also experience a sense of well-being and joy.

As we adopt the technique of protecting our mind through the practice of meditation, it enhances that joyful state within oneself. We can come to a point where an individual who has familiarised and acquainted themselves with meditation will experience a sense of continuous joy. We can call this a boon of joy, which is a real sense of joy in the mind.

The characteristic of the mind is that as we train it in being acquainted with positive attitudes, we will find it becomes better. That is one of the qualities of the mind. As we train our mind we get the positive result of the mind becoming more subdued, controlled. That is definitely the case.

The reason we need to protect our mind is emphasised, because that doesn't seem to be something that we naturally do. Instead we seem to pay much more attention to protecting our physical body. When we think about it, all the time and energy that we spend during the day is directed towards protecting our body rather than our mind.

The reality is that we are spending more time and energy protecting our body than we spend protecting our mind. Having spent so much time and energy protecting the body it is not the case that the body becomes better and better and the qualities of the body such as strength and energy increase. Of course, if it is a young child growing up you could see that there is the natural maturing of the physical

features of the body. At that stage we could say that maybe the body's physical energy becomes better. However when we refer to middle-aged people, particular after the age of 50, we will find that the body actually becomes weaker and weaker rather than stronger and stronger. The characteristics of the body, in every aspect, seem to diminish rather than increase. Even though we may not be consciously think about that, in my opinion it seems that having spent time and energy in caring for the body the result is that the body becomes weaker and we have more problems and experience more hardships.

When one experiences that result in one's life I feel that it causes one to be quite weary. One comes to a stage where one feels that it's futile, and having spent so much time and energy caring for oneself one actually experiences more hardships, more decline in energy and stamina. That brings a sort of weariness to our mind. Our mind feels depressed and has a sense of hopelessness. It also seems to be a cause of fear in one's mind because there is no stability. One does not get any good, sound results. Anxiety and fear may develop in the mind after that time and age. So, if we were to spend all our time and energy just caring for our physical body and physical conditions when we reach that stage when we become aware that we are not able to uphold our physical condition we would get really depressed.

Whereas, if we can spend some time and energy in the earlier part of our life developing our mind then because of its natural characteristics the mind will become even better and increase its potential. That will then give us solace and we will be able to be content and happy regardless of our physical conditions. I am not suggesting that we neglect the care of our body. Of course we need to care for our body to a certain extent. We do need to put time and energy into caring for our body and our physical health. However what I am suggesting is that we spend an equal amount of time, if not more, in developing the mind as that is of more importance for us. It's important to spend as much time as we can to develop the mind. So combine them together. As we care for our body we can also spend some time and energy caring for our mind. That combination will, I feel, definitely lead to a more holistic state of well-being.

Without elaborating the long-term benefits that we derive from the practice of meditation, if we were to consider even the short-term benefits in our day-to-day experiences it seems that it is really essential in order to have a good day that we spend some time and energy in the practice of meditation. The practice of meditation will definitely contribute to having a good day. If we were to consider what constitutes a bad day we would see that it is a day when our mind is in turmoil and we are overwhelmed with anxieties, disturbances and our mind is completely agitated. Whenever we experience what we consider a bad day, it is when we have had a lot of disturbances and agitation in our mind. When the mind is weighed down by worries and so forth we feel down, unhappy.

One can protect oneself from that sort of disturbance if we begin the day with a clear state of mind. The practice of meditation itself will bring about a clear state of mind, a more focused mind. We can experience for ourselves that when we have a relatively clear, focused and balanced mind, then towards the end of the day we would feel that things have gone well. That is because the mind has been in a balanced state. One has had a clear and focused mind and because of that one has not been influenced by disturbances, the afflictive emotions, that arise in one's mind. Having not

experienced that during the day we can feel quite calm, quite good, towards the end of the day; isn't it? If we wish to have a good day, good experiences from moment to moment, the practice of meditation seems to be essential. This is without mentioning the long-term benefits. There are definitely long-term benefits of meditation, too. But it is also important in relation to daily existence.

We can see how our good or bad experiences, our good or bad days, are dependent on the state of our mind. Then we will see that it is very true when the teachings say that happiness is dependent on one's own mind. That statement rings very true when we can see this from our own experience.

When we find that that statement is very true we will begin to really look within ourselves for happiness, rather than always pointing the finger outwards and finding fault outside. Instead we will begin to notice what's happening within oneself.

Having referred to the temporary benefits that we can derive from the practice of meditation it is also worthwhile that we consider the long-term benefits of the practice of meditation. In the Buddhist context, when we refer to the long-term benefits we refer to the benefits in our future lives beyond our temporary existence now.

Considering the benefits of a future life in a Buddhist context, the practice of meditation becomes a very practical approach. Life's enjoyments and pleasures are becoming less and less. Moment by moment the pleasures of this life are getting shorter rather than longer. That is the reality. We are approaching a time when we have to face the consequences of going on to the next existence. No matter how much we may want to hold onto the pleasures of this life, no matter how much we want to make our lives secure, the reality is that our life is getting shorter by the moment. This life, no matter how much attention we give to it, is relatively short. It's indeed getting shorter by the moment.

Taking this into consideration and putting some time and energy towards our well-being in a future life is very practical. As we get nearer to the point where we have to pass on, particularly when we reach a more mature age, to spend some time and energy for the well-being of a future life becomes a great solace. Somehow one feels very prepared. One would get the sense of being fully prepared and thus have no sense of fear or anxiety. Instead one has a real sense of joy in one's mind. By preparing for one's next life one feels a sense of great joy and contentment in one's mind.

Now I am not implying that I have reached that stage myself. However, it seems that when we think about the teachings in a logical sense, we can prove this through logic; that having spent time and energy focusing towards a future life one will be naturally ready for it because of one's preparation. One would be quite ready. Thus an individual gets a great sense of joy and well-being in the later part of one's life. That's why I emphasise the importance of this.

Even though I cannot claim that I have reached a great level of practice, what I can comfortably say is that I do have a feeling of joy and happiness within. This joy and happiness seems to increase in my mind. There are times when I actually become a little bit doubtful about my sense of joy and happiness because I wonder if it may be due to distractions. Sometimes we may have a false sense of joy and happiness when things seem to be going relatively well on the worldly level. So sometimes I wonder if it could be that.

But when I investigate further, I come to a point of confirming that it is not due to worldly concerns but rather a deeper sense that I feel happiness and joy within my mind.

The reason why I feel confident that the sense of joy and happiness I feel is not based on worldly concerns, is because it is not a fleeting sense of joy but rather quite long-lasting. That sense of joy and happiness seems to be quite firm and stable. We know from our experiences that when our happiness and joy is based on worldly concerns and benefits, then when the situation changes materially we will feel down and depressed. This kind of joy can change very quickly depending on external situations.

The importance of having a concern for a future life is not limited to a Buddhist approach. In every authentic religion there is a notion of how one goes on beyond this life. There is an existence afterwards. Now, of course, in Buddhism the particular connotation of a future existence is that one can be reborn again and again many times over. Even though that particular explanation is not given in other religions, there is the description of going on to either a good existence, being with God, or an unfortunate existence. The way to go on towards being in the presence of God, or in the abode of heaven, is by having strong faith in God and abiding by the advice that is given in the scriptures of that religion. Someone who develops strong faith in their own religion and really tries to practice to the best of their ability seems to gain great solace in their mind as they approach the end of this life. They seem to find joy in the sense that they will come closer to God in the next life and be born in heaven. That seems to bring great joy to their mind. What I am relating here is that the notion of future existence seems to be a common trend in every religion.

I have heard through some sources that there are some Christians that believe in reincarnation as we do in Buddhism. You must have heard of it too? The main point that I have been emphasising is the benefits of the practice of meditation, its importance for our temporary well-being as well as our future well-being.

In relation to our temporary well-being, the practice of meditation is essential if we want to keep a focused and balanced mind and attitude in life. Rather than allowing oneself to be disturbed and agitated in one's mind, it would be far better if one can actually spend some time and energy in focusing inwardly, for this will bring an immediate relief to one's mind. To that extent, one will definitely get a benefit from the practice.

The alternative is to remain disturbed. It is likely that if we are not in a meditative state and not internally focused we will blame some external situation for our difficulties and disturbances. Even if there were some external situation that is causing one distress, being overly concerned by that and blaming that as the cause for one's problems will not really bring any solace to oneself. It will bring no comfort in one's mind because external conditions can never be really perfect. And as long as we believe that external conditions are causing us problems and distress, and we become used to thinking in that way, then even when the conditions become relatively good it would not be a cause for us to be happy. Relying completely on external conditions for our happiness means that when the slightest change occurs one again feels depressed. This continues again and again. This is because we put total belief in the external conditions as a cause for our happiness.

Instead we should change that approach and look within ourselves and start to focus and meditate and see that 'regardless of the external conditions my happiness depends on my own attitudes' and to try to develop a state of mind that is more clear, focused and calm. Then, when we depend on those inner resources we will begin to experience some sense of joy and calmness within our mind. So this approach is useful.

When we have applied the appropriate technique and familiarised ourselves with that technique, we will begin to notice after some time that external conditions do not affect one as much any more. Even though the external conditions may not be perfect it does not influence us and cause us to become disturbed. Even if they were to still disturb us the duration would not be as long. That is a positive result of our practice of meditation. That is the actual sign that the practice of meditation has helped to maintain an inner strength and a positive attitude within oneself. That is something that one would notice through the practice of meditation.

It is because of the vulnerability of our mind that it is recommended that we find some solitude for the practice of meditation. Specifically it is recommended that we develop what is called the meditative state of calm abiding, which is developing single-pointed concentration on an object. It is advised in the teachings that one should first go into solitude and when one has developed that state of calm abiding one can come back into society. Then wherever one may be, one will be able to maintain one's practice of meditation because of the inner stability that one has already obtained. Otherwise, as beginners, we find that our mind is very easily affected by the slightest external conditions. When some object of attachment or anger comes forth we find it has an effect within our mind. Thus, initially it is good that we try to maintain that sort of specific, quiet time for our practice of meditation.

For the purpose of meditation we will now adopt an upright and relaxed posture. Then we need to adopt a firm commitment to keep our mind focused inward. We intentionally withdraw our mind from all distractions, all forms of disturbing thoughts, and so forth. We completely withdraw from that and bring our focus inward. Having brought our focus and attention inward we place it upon the object to meditate on which, in this instance, is the breath. By focusing on the breath for the next few minutes we try not to allow our mind to be distracted by anything else. We constantly bring our attention and focus back on the breath and try to maintain that focus on that natural inflow and outflow of our breath for as long as we can. Just try to maintain that image and focus on that for the next few minutes. *(Pause for meditation.)*

If anyone has a question you can raise your hand.

Question: It was explained in the last session that when the intermediate state being is about to take rebirth it will see it's future parents in copulation; so in the case of the fertilisation of the egg in a test tube, how can the intermediate state being see the parents in copulation?

Answer: Actually, as the teaching describes, it is a vision that the intermediate state being has of the parents in copulation. When it gets near to that vision and none of the body parts appear then that is when anger is developed. Following the explanation of the teachings, in the case of a test tube conception, when the conditions are met it would not obstruct the intermediate state being from still having a

vision of the parents. Whoever the sperm and the egg belong to - they are the parents. The intermediate state being could still have a vision of those parents in sexual union when they actually are not in union. In that way having a test tube baby does not contradict the explanation in the teachings of how the intermediate state being's consciousness takes rebirth.

Maybe the misunderstanding from your point of view arises where it is explained that even though the parents are not in copulation, the intermediate state being sees them in copulation. That may be the point where the misunderstanding may arise.

The actual reason why the text gives that explanation seems to be that when the egg and sperm meet the parents are not actually in sexual union. The meeting of the egg and sperm occurs only afterwards. As we know scientifically it's only after the father and mother have been in union that the sperm meets the egg. So the condition for the consciousness of the intermediate state being to enter the womb has to be where the egg and sperm have already met, for that becomes the right condition. Thus it has to be a vision of the parents in union rather than actually being in union because when the parents are in union it is not yet a suitable time; the conditions are not right for the intermediate state being to enter the womb. In the case of a normal conception both parents are in sexual union first and then, when the sperm actually meets the egg the conditions are right for the consciousness of the intermediate state being to enter the womb.

It is similar with a test tube baby. That could be the case, too. The main condition for conception to take place is the two substances meeting together. Thus we can say that the parents don't have to be actually in union. With a test tube baby they are not in union but the conditions are right for the intermediate state being to enter the womb.

Actually, the main doubt or question that could arise here is, 'At what point does the consciousness enter?' Is it in the tube itself when the sperm and egg are put together and fertilised? Is it at that time? Or does the consciousness enter when the fertilised egg has been put in the mother's womb? It seems that according to the teachings it is more suitable to assume that the consciousness enters only after the egg has been put back into the mother's womb. However, there is a doubt, a question that can arise here.

Question: Is it the case where the intermediate state being chooses its own parents?

According to the teachings it would have to be explained as causes and conditions and that basically comes down to karma. In the case of an ordinary intermediate state being they have no choice because it is due to the karma that they have the vision of the parents to be. Now, of course, the parents also have a certain karma for that being to be conceived by them. So there is the karma from the parents' side and the karma of the being themselves to be reborn to those particular parents.

There are other particular conditions that have to take place such as the seed so forth. These are explained in more detail in the teachings. It is due to causes and conditions that all of this takes place. To answer the question, it is not as if it is the choice of that one intermediate state being that decides everything. A whole range of other causes and conditions have to take place as well.

We find that at this time conception is not an easy matter. Even when the father and mother are in union the sperm has to have potency. It seems that some times that even if there

is sperm it is not potent or there is something lacking in the sperm and it can not fertilise the egg. So from the mother's side all the conditions may be right but if something is missing from the father's side then one of the conditions is missing. Even if the father's sperm is potent something can be lacking from the mother's side. We can see that there are many causes and conditions that take place, aren't there?

Question: Can Geshe-la explain further how one meditates with the eyes open?

When I mentioned that some traditions advise you to have your eyes open when you meditate I was not referring to the Buddhist tradition. Other traditions advise that. They have their particular reasons. For example, one of the prominent teachers from the 'Bon' tradition, I think his name is Namkha Norbu, advises to have the eyes open when you meditate. In some Hindu traditions you keep your eyes completely shut.

The Buddhist technique is neither of those. The Buddhist meditation technique adopts a point somewhere in the middle where the eyes are not completely wide open but not completely shut. That is the advice of the Buddhist meditation technique.

However, His Holiness the Dalai Lama has mentioned once that if one is really in deep and prolonged meditation it seems that the eyes naturally shut anyway. That is when one has a good internal focus. Physically the eyes may shut. That's what His Holiness seems to indicate.

What one needs to keep in mind is that according to the explanations of our system the object to be focused on is an internal object. Regardless of whether the eyes are open or shut, the main thing one has to acquaint oneself with is focusing on the internal object. When one is able to identify and maintain one's focus on that internal object, whether the eyes are open or closed doesn't really make much difference. But, initially having the eyes open can cause excitement to arise. Seeing things can cause excitement to arise in the mind.

If one has not reached a point where one is focusing on the internal object with inner consciousness, what we call mental consciousness, and our eyes are slightly open we can be easily influenced by the things that we see with our eye consciousness. That can become a distraction. If they are completely shut it can cause laxity and drowsiness. That can also be an obstacle.

Question: In the case of twins, is it the case that two consciousnesses enter the same egg and sperm? If so, how can this be possible karmically?

I can't be certain about what that answer would be in terms of twins. Could it actually be the lapse between two sperm coming at different times and fertilising the same egg? Could it be that? Or maybe it is the case it is the same sperm and same egg. Somehow, due to karma, it makes two separate substances from that substance. It splits and into two and two consciousnesses are able to enter? Investigating how that works, from science or from your experience, you would be able to know more about that.

Is there a possibility of two sperm entering one egg? One evening it could be one and the next day another sperm enters the egg? Could that be possible? There are also cases where, as a mother once confided to me, there was intercourse with two different individuals within a very short span so the mother was concerned who could really be the father. That indicates it's not really sure when it happens

quite soon. The mother was saying, "How do I know? How do I tell which is the father?" Some parts look like one person, some other parts look like the other person. Of course, I couldn't tell! (*Much laughter!*)

It might be too cold if the embryo has been frozen. The conditions may not be suitable for a normal birth as a human to take place. Of course I am not able to give all the details of the actual occurrences. My opinion is that conception takes place when the fertilised egg is put into the mother's womb. That becomes the suitable condition for the consciousness to enter.

If the consciousness has entered into the fertilised egg in the test tube, the frozen embryo, then if that embryo was not used the logical explanation would be that this is a case of murder, killing a being. The teachings indicate that the negative karma of killing a human is incurred when you kill either a fully developed person or one that is in the development stage that we call an embryo.

It is hard for us to be fully certain in this case. Someone who has clairvoyance may be able to see how it actually happens and give the answer. But for us, we still have to leave it with a sense of doubt. With some situations it seems that if we try to remove one doubt then another doubt arises. No matter what we think, we don't seem to solve the problem. Maybe we're just wearing ourselves out. It's almost like a child keeps asking 'Why?' after the mother gives an explanation. The mother finally gets tired.

We can conclude for the evening. Before we do we'll spend a few minutes in meditation. This time, by withdrawing our mind internally, we keep our focus on the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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