
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual we can spend some time in meditation. If we are to claim that we are meditators then it is appropriate that we actually spend some time meditating.

The purpose of having a meeting between politicians, for example, is to discuss politics, and our purpose in gathering here is to meditate. (*Laughter*) People don't gather together without any reason - there always has to be a purpose. So as our gathering is a gathering of meditators, then naturally we have to do some meditation.

As mentioned regularly, in order to engage in meditation one needs to find the appropriate conducive physical posture. If the very appearance of our physical posture is conducive then that really helps to maintain a positive frame of mind for meditation.

Before beginning any practice, the first thing is to generate a positive attitude or motivation for that practice. There can be different levels of motivation that one can generate. The most supreme motivation is the bodhichitta motivation, which is the altruistic wish to achieve enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings. If one is not familiar with that attitude or motivation, then one can adopt the next best thing, which is an attitude of love and compassion. Actually the bodhichitta attitude, the altruistic wish to achieve enlightenment, is based on love and compassion. Thus it would be appropriate if we generate such an attitude of love and compassion, wishing to benefit other sentient beings, and alleviate all suffering.

The wish to benefit others is a very noble intention that we must try to maintain at all times, particularly in relation to those that we live and associate with regularly. The intention of wishing to benefit the other is essential for good harmonious relationships and therefore our own well-being.

The literal meaning of meditation is to familiarise ourselves with a positive intention, and the wish to benefit others would be the noblest intention that we can have. The practical consequence of generating such a noble attitude of wishing to benefit others is that it will prevent us from harming others. That is a definite outcome of maintaining a wish to benefit others. The stronger the intention of wishing to benefit others, the stronger the wish not to harm, or hurt the others will be. The opposite is also true: if one does not have to wish to benefit others, then the attitude of wishing to harm can arise very easily.

The genuine attitude wishing to benefit others is also a means of having real power over others. There are those

who ask whether there are special mantras that can be recited to control others (*laughter*), but real dominance arises from the wish to benefit others.

Another benefit of the attitude of wishing to benefit others is that it brings people together and develops close relationships, whereas those who lack that intention of benefiting others will naturally develop a distance from others. Thus a means of developing a good harmonious connection with others is that wish to benefit others, and a stronger that wish is the more likely it is that one will have good relationships.

However the actual purpose of adopting the technique of meditation is that one will have control over one's own mind, and be able to subdue one's mind. When one has control over one's mind one actually becomes the real boss of oneself, and one will really have control over whatever one does.

Conversely if one does not have control over one's mind then one becomes a slave to whatever the mind thinks of, and comes under the influence of the delusions. Right now, as ordinary beings we may be under the influence of the delusions, thus we need to try to reverse that situation. Then we will be in control, rather than being under the control of the deluded mind. This is done by looking within oneself rather than looking outside at others.

What we are trying to observe and identify in the practice of meditation is the types of mind that influence us to engage in those activities and distractions that disturb us, where the consequences of our activities is that we become disturbed and agitated. What are the specific types of mind that influence us in that way? The first step in taking control over ourselves is identifying those specific negative states of mind. Then one can work at minimising the influence of those negative states of mind.

When we have identified the specific negative states of mind that influence us to engage in destructive activities then, as mentioned earlier, the more we distance ourselves from the influence of those negative states of mind, the quicker we will come to the point where we will actually have a great sense of release and freedom, along with a sense of joy and contentment. That sense of release is also accompanied by a clarity of mind. To use an analogy, if someone emerges from a long period of oppressive darkness, and sees bright light they would enjoy a sense of real release and clarity, wouldn't they? Our internal experience would be similar to that.

Even the slightest experience of the sense of joy on being released from a negative state of mind will give an inkling of how much joy and happiness a real meditator would experience. Right now however, we will just have to base much of our practice of meditation on the faith that we will eventually experience that joy. However when we get some experience from our own practice then that will verify that the meditation technique is a genuine unique tool to bring about genuine happiness.

When one has even that initial small experience from one's practice of meditation then one needs to try to maintain that technique and be persistent with maintaining the practice. Whatever measure of time one

has to spend and whatever technique one is using would be the appropriate technique to maintain and continue using. If one starts to assume that there might be a better technique, or another more advanced form of practice that would be of more value, then one would have missed the point, and become sidetracked. Then there will not be consistent results.

Whatever level of experience one has gained from one's own meditation practice will verify the benefit of the meditation technique, and one will then be able to confidently share that technique with those with whom one has a relationship or a connection, who is perhaps also suffering from too much distraction, anxiety, fears, or worries. Through having tried out the technique for oneself and having experienced its benefits one will be able to confidently and wisely share that technique with others at an appropriate time.

That ability to share with others is based upon primarily our own good intention, the wish to benefit others. If we have cultivated that wish to benefit others prior to our practice then whatever benefit we get from the practice we will be naturally and spontaneously able to share with others. Thus the combination of the wish to benefit others and the experience that we get from our practice will allow us to share with others, and be of benefit to them. This shows the importance of generating a positive motivation and wish to benefit others.

Thus there are long-term and practical benefits of practising meditation with the good intention that was described earlier. Now we can actually adopt the practice of meditation a few minutes.

Being mindful within the comfortable posture of meditation we need to first of all withdraw our mind from all forms of external distractions as well as the internal distractions, which are our own conceptual thoughts. When we relate this to the thought patterns within our mind, we will come to notice that they are actually the same thoughts and processes that seem to churn around in our mind over and over again, over weeks, months and even years. If we think back to a few years ago we will notice that it is the same churning going round and round and round.

Withdrawing our minds from the distractions involves withdrawing our attention and focus from external distractions and also internal distractions, which are the negative states of mind that we call the delusions. To withdraw from all internal and external distractions, we bring the focus of our mind inwards. Just through the mere fact of withdrawing our attention and focus from the distractions we will notice that the mind has already begun to settle down, and become much quieter and much more settled. However, at our level, if we don't have something to focus on it is almost impossible to maintain a completely focused mind. So having withdrawn our mind from the distractions we need to have a focal object as a way of anchoring our mind, so that it is free from distractions.

What we choose here, as an appropriate object for us beginners, is our own breath. Thus having withdrawn our mind from all distractions, we bring our focus inward, and then we place our full attention and focus

one-hundred-percent on the breath itself. As we actually breathe in and out we imagine that we can see our breath coming in and going out, and then we keep our entire focus and attention upon that breath. If we do that sincerely and wholeheartedly for the next few minutes, then we will notice that our mind definitely becomes much calmer and more settled. During the period of our meditation we will definitely experience a real sense of quietness within our own mind. Thus we adopt this technique for the next few minutes. (*pause for meditation*)

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

4.2.2.1.2.2.2. The measure of having produced the mind that strives for liberation

We can now cover some more parts of the text. The last section explained was on how after someone dies they assume the intermediate state of existence, and how from that intermediate state of existence one takes rebirth. In terms of the rebirth the text explained the four types of birth as miraculous birth, birth from the womb, birth from an egg, and birth from warmth.

Then the text goes onto a second main heading - how to develop a sense of renunciation by seeing the faults of cyclic existence. We have covered the causes of the cyclic existence, and how we enter into cyclic existence, and now the text explains the criteria for developing renunciation. What is the measure of having developed renunciation?

Having reflected upon the first two noble truths, the truth of suffering and the truth of origination, one then develops a very spontaneous strong intention to be free from the sufferings of cyclic existence, and longs for liberation. But one has not yet developed a sense of renunciation.

Having explained the various types of sufferings that are experienced in cyclic existence in detail, the text further explains that these sufferings do not randomly occur or come about without any causes and conditions. Rather, each and every type of suffering and uncomfortable experience has its own particular causes and conditions. The second truth, the truth of origination, was also explained in detail. It points out that the causes of all types of suffering lie in the two main causes, the karma that we create and the delusions that initiate the karma to be accumulated. Thus, the delusions are the main cause for all the sufferings of cyclic existence.

The teachings go into great detail explaining the various types of delusions that we have as ordinary beings. One comes to recognise that the causes of all unwanted sufferings are the delusions that lie within oneself. Based on that root cause, karma is created, and one comes to recognise that unless and until one can overcome the delusions and the karma one has created, one cannot be free from suffering. Then the strong intention or wish to overcome the delusions arises within one's mind. However just the wish to be free from delusions and overcome sufferings is not actual renunciation.

One may have the occasional thoughts about being free from the truth of sufferings and the cause of suffering,

but not yet developed a genuine sense of renunciation. What is a genuine sense of renunciation? The measure of having developed a genuine sense of renunciation is likened to the spontaneous and strong intention of prisoners in a notorious jail wishing to be free. A prisoner in a prison where every moment of existence is undesirable and uncomfortable would have a very strong spontaneous, and unceasing wish to be free from that prison. Every moment they would be thinking 'how can I be free from these conditions?'

When our wish to be free from the sufferings and pleasures of cyclic existence is as strong and as spontaneous as that prisoner's wish, then that is the measure of having developed a sense of renunciation. How does one develop that wish? One reflects on the unsatisfactory nature of cyclic existence. When one looks into every aspect of cyclic existence one comes to the point of recognising that there is no certainty whatsoever, and that even with the good things of cyclic existence, such as being famous and renowned, there is no certainty of always remaining in that state. We know of so many cases of once famous people who are denigrated and who become completely ridiculous later on. Having a lot of wealth might seem to be desirable state to be in, but even that has no certainty or stability. A wealthy person can become very poor at any time. Likewise with good companions: there is no certainty and reliability in friends, as even the closest of companions can turn into a sworn enemy at any moment.

When we look into every aspect of cyclic existence in this way, we realise that there is no certainty, and that in fact even the so-called pleasures are really of an unsatisfactory nature. At that point one could develop a real sense of disgust towards or disenchantment with cyclic existence, because there is no real sense of satisfaction and no real happiness and in fact only dissatisfaction in cyclic existence. Then the wish to be free arises really strongly and spontaneously. Once that has developed one needs to further enhance and strengthen that sense of wishing to be free from samsara.

It may be unrealistic to assume that one will be able to actually develop a real genuine sense of renunciation to the point of actually being able to use that as a means to achieve liberation, and become liberated in this very lifetime. However there are practical benefits in contemplating with the intent of developing renunciation. One will actually gain a sense of distrust in samsaric pleasures and develop a sense of wariness about placing a complete trust in the good conditions of samsara. We will have understood that there is no stability, and that one cannot totally rely upon good samsaric conditions. As explained earlier there is no certainty in accumulating wealth, friendship and so forth, and since there is no certainty it is futile to be completely consumed with pursuing these goals.

Developing and then maintaining that sense of wariness and disenchantment with the pleasures of samsara will mean that when we do face difficulties and problems, it will not be such a shock, and we will not be so surprised. That is because we will already have acquainted our mind with the understanding that this is the nature of

cyclic existence, the nature of samsara. When our mind is not so taken aback and shocked and disappointed in this way, we will actually be able to maintain a level of equanimity and a sense of joy and happiness in our mind. That would be the practical benefit that we derive from this practice. Then we will definitely gain positive benefits in this life from this attitude or state of mind.

If we compare the mental capacities of someone who has not contemplated the nature of cyclic existence and developed a sense of renunciation, with someone who has spent time and energy in developing this state of mind, we would come to notice that there is definitely a difference in their very approach to life and how they actually handle things when things go wrong. The one who has developed a strong sense of renunciation will definitely be able to maintain some level of stability and joy, regardless of difficult external situations. So we can definitely see the great benefit to be derived from this practice.

What we need to also understand here, and be clear about, is that the teachings do not present cyclic existence as being the fault, but rather that it is our craving and attachment to cyclic existence that is the fault. If we actually have strong attachment to our environment then that is the fault that will bring unwanted suffering. The stronger our attachment to a friend or companion, the greater the suffering that will be experienced when separation takes place. Whereas if we are with someone without strong attachment, such as strangers, we may enjoy their company from while and when we have to separate there will be no sense of pain or suffering. That is because we don't have strong attachment. Whereas the stronger the attachment we have, the greater the suffering that will be experienced when separation takes place. If we lessen the attachment then the suffering to be experienced from that will naturally be lessened as well.

As I stress regularly a sense of real compassion has to be cultivated in your relationship with your partner or companion. One can only benefit from a sense of compassion - there is no harm at all. So that is what is to be cultivated and further enhanced in our daily lives.

Before ending the session we will spend a few moments in meditation and this time, as we bring our focus inward and distance ourselves from distractions we keep the attention and focus on the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra. The reason why I mentioned focusing on the sound, as the focal object is that there may be those who don't feel comfortable with reciting the mantra. But just hearing and focusing on the sound will help to keep the focus or attention anchored.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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