
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual, we can spend some time in meditation. While meditating we tend to sit in a comfortable and upright position. Wouldn't it be worthwhile then to also have a good mindset as well? If both our physical body and our mind are in a relaxed state, then naturally this will have a positive effect on us.

When people appear to be relaxed or content, and they have a nice physical appearance or a nice demeanour, we see them as appealing and that is mainly because of their good attitudes. If the person has a positive, kind attitude that contributes to the welfare of others, then they seem joyful and content and have a naturally appealing appearance. So, we can conclude that what appears on the physical level is very much dependent on the mind.

The main point is that physical relaxation depends very much on the state of the mind. Thus for our physical well being we need to pay attention to our mental state, which involves transforming negative states of mind into a positive ones. For negative states of mind are detrimental to our physical health and are categorised as the delusions.

If we analyse a person who is behaving badly, agitated, or looks physically disturbed, we can see that their mental state is disturbed. Their mind is full of anxiety, worries, and utterly preoccupied with lots of distractions. They are constantly thinking of so many different things which don't help them at all; they have futile worries constantly churning around in their mind. A person who is mentally disturbed will naturally also be agitated. Sometimes, if the mind is too stressed and too tight, then that can lead to the physical body being very tight and feeling stressed.

When we look into these factors, we can see that a relaxed and calm state of mind definitely has a positive affect on our physical body. So the more calm and relaxed our state of mind is, the more positive effect this will have on our physical well being. If we really look into the relationship between the physical body and mind, then we can see that there is definitely a strong connection.

At this stage, we may acknowledge that having a positive, calm and relaxed state of mind will definitely contribute to our physical well being. While we accept that, we may still find it difficult to naturally achieve a positive and relaxed state of mind. However, being in an agitated and distracted state of mind, which leads to anxiety and worries, is something that seems to be natural for us; we don't have to put much effort. Being distracted seems to be our default state.

Why is that so? If we look honestly into our state of mind, we will notice that we give in to our distractions. We allow our mind to be fully occupied with them. In fact, we search for more and more distractions, and we try to fill our day with so many thoughts and ideas and plans. This is something we do voluntarily. Whereas we don't seem to spend much time in trying to reduce our distractions or

trying to make our mind more centred. Distractions go on, not only throughout the day, but day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year. Thus we have become so habituated with the distractions. We allow our mind to be completely influenced by distractions and all the rest that follows. This seems natural because we have allowed our mind to be easily influenced by distractions. A centred and inwardly focussed mind doesn't seem natural right now and that is because we are not acquainted with that positive state of mind.

While it may seem natural for our mind to be influenced by distractions, if we don't make any attempt to reverse that, and continue to let our mind be in the chaotic state it is in now, then our mind will be more and more chaotic and more and more distracted. The influence of distractions on our mind causes more worries and more stress. It is a matter of paying attention to our state of mind. If we don't pay attention, then we may not see the connection between a distracted mind and the worries and stress we experience. But if we really pay attention and look into ourselves, then we will notice – because most of us by now have enough experience in life to identify a lot of the problems that we create within ourselves – that all types of problems arise as a result of being distracted with sensual worldly pleasures and thoughts. So it is reasonable that we try to get relief from that and to make an attempt to make our mind a bit more relaxed. If we begin to put some effort into it, it is possible.

When we clearly identify the connection between our distracted mind and the restlessness within ourselves, which causes our worries and stress, then we naturally want to try to reverse that situation and try to find a remedy. The remedy is to reduce the distractions in our mind. Of course, initially it may be difficult if not impossible to completely distance our mind from our distractions. But we can slowly put some effort into it, even though initially we may not be able to withdraw our mind from the distractions one hundred percent. If we try to make an effort where maybe fifty percent of our mind is brought inwards, then we can use that initial familiarity to increase our ability to focus inwards. And then our mind will become even more familiar with that. As we spend more time and energy in focussing inward and not allowing our mind to be influenced by distractions, then we can experience a real sense of relief and calmness. Applying the correct meditation technique helps us to achieve a calm and relaxed mind.

The actual meditation technique involves withdrawing our mind, and intentionally not allowing our mind to be influenced by the distractions. We acknowledge the distractions for what they are and do not allow our mind to follow whatever whims arise in our mind. We choose an object to focus on and bring our full attention onto it. When we can successfully bring our attention and focus on this object, then we can start to feel a real sense of release, a real calmness that takes over. Some people experience a sense of joy and calmness that they have never before experienced in their lives. It is such a pleasant surprise to discover how calm and peaceful the mind can be. The reason why a sense of calmness and peace occurs within us initially, is because the mind is withdrawn from all distractions and our focus is firmly and completely placed upon on the object of meditation.

But the reverse is also true. When our mind is distracted and not focused internally, we will experience all the problems again mentioned previously. The severity of these problems

depends on how much our mind is swayed by distractions. As we apply the meditation technique, we experience a sense of relief from distractions and experience a sense of calmness and joy. This meditation technique also helps to protect a kind and loving attitude towards others that we may have developed. This positive state of mind can also reduce the agitation in our mind where we can become bad tempered and say things that are totally inappropriate.

So, we do experience a sense of real calmness and joy when we have an attitude of kindness and concern for others. This attitude is enhanced when we are calm and joyful, and our behaviour also appeals to others. With that sense of joy within ourselves, we can actually be of help to others, which is welcomed and is appreciated. A positive and calm state of mind is what starts to draw people towards you, and a greater circle of people that really appreciate your presence. While the opposite is also true, our negative demeanour has a negative effect on others, and consequently we will not get on well with them at all. This results in our friends and associates starting to keep their distance from us.

Thus, the most positive state of mind is the state of mind that is based on genuine kindness, concern and compassion for others. This positive state of mind with its genuine concern and compassion for others is not only recognised by humans but even by animals. Even animals respond in a positive way towards someone who is kind towards them.

I watched a program once that had a story about a lady who had nursed and cared for a baby hippopotamus. When it was big enough it was released into a river. After some time when the lady went to the site where the hippo had been released, it came to the bank and showed clear signs of excitement and joy in seeing the lady. Then it came out of the water and started to lick the lady's arms and face. It was quite amazing to see the hippo recognising and showing great affection to her.

This is astonishing because normally animals are considered to be a rather stupid, but they do feel and respond to human affection even after a long time. When you see the footage of them together, they seem to really happy; the hippopotamus and its caretaker seem to be like a family. This is a good example of extending a genuine sense of love and kindness to others and benefiting from that. The more we have a genuine sense of love and concern for others, the more genuine friendship and companionship we will have in our lives. We will never experience a lack of companionship when we have a positive state of mind that expresses genuine love and concern for others.

The opposite of that is also true. If we lack a genuine sense of love and kindness, then even our friends and companions start to slowly shy away from us to the point where we may start to feel a great sense of loneliness. If we do not wish to experience loneliness, then we must cultivate the cause of having a true and lasting companionship. The main point is that this is cultivated through the practise of meditation. If we meditate with the mere intention of generating concentration and a focused mind, then that in itself may not take us very far. But when the meditation is done with the intention to develop, cultivate and further enhance a positive state of mind of kindness and love, then definitely every attempt that we make in meditation enhances our sense of calmness and joy. It will also enhance our sense of genuine concern and love for others. When we meditate with that motive in our mind, then every moment we spend in meditation is highly worthwhile and will definitely

contribute to our well being and the well being of the others as well.

The affection felt between an animal and a human is something remarkable when we think about it. We are different species, so what makes that connection? It is the fact that we both have minds that can experience similar emotions and feelings. Even though we are different physically, there can be genuine good feelings and connections between the two species. When positive emotions and feelings are cultivated within both animals and humans, then they both have a good connection. In fact, that connection is much more worthwhile than other aspects we pay a lot of attention to, such as wealth and jewellery. If we carry a big lump of gold or diamond with us wherever we go, then it is questionable whether this will help make our mind happy. Whereas being with an animal that we have strong affection towards can have a positive effect. It can make us feel warm and joyful inside because the animal has a mind just as we do, with the same feelings and emotions. A lump of gold or some piece of jewellery like a diamond is just an inanimate object and cannot really give anything back to us, such as feelings or emotions.

I once noticed that an ox and a horse that were in the same farm enclosure. From a distance, I noticed that the ox and the horse were actually very good friends. They ran together and nuzzled each other; in that way there were good friends. It was remarkable to see two completely different species get along well and be good friends. They could have chosen to feel lonely by themselves; nevertheless they helped each other to relieve that sense of loneliness by becoming good friends. The horse helps to relieve the sense of loneliness for the ox, and the ox helps to relieve the loneliness for the horse. They both contributed to each other's well being and feeling of companionship. We can learn a lot from that.

We need to become familiar with the appropriate meditation technique in order to get any positive effects. One of the most important elements of the meditation technique is to be very clear about the object that we choose to focus on. The object has to be internalised. We need to bring a vivid image of the external object that we are focussing on. We need to try to bring to mind the colour of the object and the shape of the object. We try to bring a vivid image of the external object, first by looking at it and observing it, then trying to bring that clear image inside our own mind. When we focus on the object of meditation, it is the internalised image of the object that we are focusing on, not the external object. The external object is only a reference point. After referring to it, we internalise the object and focus on it within our own mind. After clearly identifying the image of the object, we then try to keep a hundred percent focus on that. That is how it is explained in the teaching. In our regular meditation sessions here, as most of you would be familiar with, we focus on our own breath. We use our breath as our reference object to focus on. We internalise that breath and focus on that.

In order to internalise the actual external object, in this case our own breath, it must not be a laboured breath. Also, the breath should be free from sound, so try to breathe in and out silently without making any sound. The breath also needs to be level, that is, free from inhalation being long and exhalation being short, or the other way around. Regulating the breath in this way in itself leads to a calming effect. The meditation practise involves a commitment from us to withdraw ourselves from all internal and external distractions and bring our focus inward. As we withdraw

our mind from all other thoughts and concerns, we bring our attention and focus inward. Initially it is advised that we keep the mind just in that space. As we distance our mind from distractions, we just try to maintain that state of the mind - being free from any thoughts and ideas and worries for even just a few moments. Because the mind will not be able to remain in that state for too long, we need to focus on the object in order to anchor the mind from not getting distracted again. Just as we are about to notice the mind starting to get distracted again by some thoughts, then at that point we focus on the object, which in this case is our own breath. As an internalised image of the breath, we can imagine seeing it coming in and going out. This is what we focus on in our meditation. For the next few minutes this is the technique that we adopt, so reassessing our body and posture we try to remain in that state. *(Pause for meditation).*

Questions

Question: Regarding the plane crash a few weeks ago, how is it that people with no karma with each other come together and die together?

Response: According to the Buddhist explanation, it is definitely due to karma that they perished in that way. But the specific karma that they created to die together at that particular time that is very subtle. It is hard to know the specifics and details. The general explanation of karma in the teachings is that there is a category of karma which is called the consequences of collective karma. So, if this was the effect of their collective karma, then actions they may have committed together in the past, maybe not in this life but sometime in past lives, they might have all gathered together where they may have actively taken the lives of others, for example in a war. That could have been possible. This could be one explanation of the result of collective karma. Apparently it was not sure where the plane was for a while, and then they found the crash site. It is intriguing to think about what prompted those people to go together on that ill-fated flight, and then what actually led to the consequences of them all dying together. Definitely there must be some sort of karma that pushes them to decide to go off together, and then all end up being perished in that way.

There is one particular technique within a series of meditations on death that is called the uncertainty of time of death. This is a clear example of the uncertainty of time of death. It would not have occurred to any of them that they would die on that ill-fated flight. Most of them were middle-aged, yet it was an untimely death that occurred. There can be many causes leading to an untimely death. Even in the west there is some notion of how malevolent forces or some sort of spirit can influence people. Tibetans have a strong belief that sometimes people are led off somewhere by themselves, influenced by some sort of spirit, which would then cause them to die in unfavourable circumstances.

The underlying main cause of death is always karma, but a malevolent spirit can be a condition for death. In this case, who knows, it could be something like that as well. A malevolent spirit or ghost may have a connection in this case. There are certain areas that are very prone to accidents. Why would one place have many accidents over and over again? Again, an explanation could be that some sort like spirit is attracting drivers to crash into the site. These are just the conditions we are talking about, different kinds of conditions for the causes of death. As mentioned previously, the main cause of death will be always our own karma. There are also instances where people are saved from certain disaster, or certain death. One girl confided to me

that she had a terrible accident. Just before the accident she was reciting some mantras of the Buddha. And as she was reciting she happened to be involved in this accident where the car was completely damaged. Besides a slight injury in her neck, she was unscratched. She told me herself that 'definitely it was the prayers that I was reciting protected me from that'.

Question: I was wondering about the issue of organ donation. What are the issues - the benefits and can this in any way cause a disturbance to the body?

Response: Of course as we know, organs are only donated with the consent of the person. They are alive when they made the decision to donate their organs. They are not attached to their organs because they have already agreed to give them away. This is based on the good intention of giving. Because of their noble decision I don't think it will disturb their mind when the organs are extracted. As you say, it is invasive because the organs are harvested soon after death. Apparently if they are left in the body for too long, then they cannot be used to benefit others. But will this disturb their mind or consciousness? I believe that it won't, based on the fact they had already intended to give them away. People who agree to organ donation and have given their consent will, according to the Buddhist explanation, create so much merit because they are giving their body parts to benefit others. They had to be alive to make that consent, so they are aware of it. The fact that they are consciously and deliberately making that donation to allow others to use their body parts, from their side is actually a great practice of generosity, and consequently a means for accumulating great merit. As an ordinary person, it is hard for us to give up our body parts when we are alive.

According to the Buddhist teachings, giving away parts of the body (when we are alive) is not advisable for beginner level practitioners. It is only when you reach a certain level in practice where there will be no difference between giving away your body parts and giving away a meal. There is no attachment and no sense of loss in giving up the body. It is just like giving a meal to someone where we don't really have a sense of losing anything; it's relatively easy to do. So when we reach a level of practice and state of mind where we are able to be generous with our body parts, then it is permissible and definitely a good deed to do. But as mentioned earlier, for an ordinary being, since we are not able to do that, the only other option is to be generous with our body parts after death. This is also good deed, a great deed, but that is the only way we can do it without any sense of loss. In the Buddhist teachings, there are three different types of generosity, and this is under the category of 'the generosity of protecting others from fears' or 'protecting others'. The protection is protecting others from imminent death by providing vital organs. When vital organs have been donated to others, it will save them from death. This is an example of the generosity of protection.

Before we conclude for the evening, we can spend another few minutes in meditation. We use the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra as the object of focus. We will try to keep our full attention and focus on the sound as we hear the mantra being recited.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited version

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