
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual, it would be good to spend some time in meditation, sitting in an appropriate, relaxed, upright posture with a clear, bright mind.

As a consequence of adopting a physically relaxed state and a clear and bright mind, one will feel some mental calmness and tranquillity. Thus that combination of a physically and mentally relaxed state would definitely be of real use in our life, wouldn't it?

Our physical and verbal gestures are depended on the state of our mind:

When one is able to maintain a clear, relaxed state of mind, apart from the positive effect it has on us, it can definitely have a positive effect on those with whom we associate, such as our friends and partners. That positive effect comes from us feeling calm and peaceful. When we feel calm and peaceful, we are less likely to get easily annoyed and upset by things that we normally find irritating or intolerable – it is much easier for us to accept these things with a peaceful state of mind. And when we don't get easily upset and annoyed ourselves, it will definitely have a positive effect on others.

We can see for ourselves that when our mind is agitated and we are feeling ill-at-ease, even the slightest unfavourable thing that occurs will easily irritate us, making us abrupt with others. In situations like that, whatever we utter is likely to displease others, and our gestures will appear unappealing, even inappropriate, to others. Thus our unpleasant actions and words will have a negative effect upon others. As I have stressed before, whenever we feel a little uptight or on edge, the ones who will be most affected are not strangers but those closest to us, such as our immediate family members, our partners and our close companions and friends. The ones towards whom we tend to express our irritation and unease when we feel on edge and short-tempered are the ones we normally love and care for.

If we look into our mannerisms – our speech and physical gestures – we find there are always two sides. There is speech that is pleasing, kind and soothing to others, and there is also speech that sounds harsh and unpleasant to others. In terms of physical mannerisms, there are those that are pleasing and appreciated by others, and gestures that are displeasing and unappealing. Certain gestures are automatically not appreciated by anyone as soon as they are expressed, whereas certain gestures and speech are appreciated by others. The impact of our speech and gestures leads back to our state of mind. If we were to attempt to bring more calmness and peace to the mind, it would definitely have a positive impact upon others.

The benefits of analytical wisdom:

The term analytical wisdom is used in the Buddhist teachings to refer to a particular type of intelligence that is able to detect which of our words and actions are appropriate and conducive for ourselves and others, and which are inappropriate or harmful. For as long as we are unable to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate actions, we will not know how to communicate well with others. Once we are able to clearly distinguish between that which is appropriate and that which is inappropriate, the next step is to adopt behaviour which is useful to both oneself and others and to avoid what is harmful. That responsibility lies with us: we have to actually engage in the practice.

The significance of practising the Dharma:

Once we have identified the appropriate behaviour, we have to actually engage in the practice ourselves. Then we can see for ourselves how the spiritual practice of the Dharma is the means for making us a good person, a good human being. When we are able to identify the source of positive actions for ourselves and others as lying within our own mind, it will become clear to us that ultimately our real protection lies within us – as mentioned in the teachings, our real protection comes from the practice of the Dharma that we develop within ourselves. Thus we will get a clearer understanding of what inner protection actually means.

As I normally emphasise, we need to pay the utmost attention to ourselves when we are feeling unhappy or agitated. One must remind oneself at such times to be very careful, because all of our faults come from an agitated, unhappy state of mind, and one is in great danger at such times. When our mind is unhappy, we need to pay extra attention to ourselves and try to calm down. When we learn this for ourselves from self-analysis and our own experience, we will also learn how to better deal with others when they are unhappy, agitated or on edge. When our close companions and relatives are unhappy or on edge, we should know how to handle it, how to relate to them, how to speak to them. That is very important in our dealings with others.

The importance of practising patience:

From our experience, we will notice the kinds of physical and verbal mannerisms and gestures we show when we are feeling a bit depressed. We can see that they seem inappropriate. This is because our mind is unsettled. If one accepts this within oneself, then one should also be able to accept it when others express inappropriate gestures and mannerisms. That behaviour comes from their unsettled minds. When we can relate in this way to others, we should be able to be more tolerant when they express inappropriate gestures or mannerisms. This is the practice of patience. If the other person can also learn that lesson, then both sides can be tolerant and practice patience with each other. That would contribute to a genuine understanding between the two, providing the foundation for a good relationship.

When we relate to how important practices such as patience are in our relationships with others, and in our understanding of them, we will begin to appreciate that

the results of our practice of the Dharma – our spiritual practice in the Buddhist context – are not just relevant to a future lifetime. In fact we can experience the good results of our practice right now, in our everyday life. As mentioned earlier, patience is a key element for a good relationship with others. What would be the consequences if one were to lack patience?

If one has a companion whom one considers a kind, nice person, there will be occasions when they will be having a rough time of it - most ordinary people are bound to have difficulties at one time or another - when their mind is unsettled. From one's own experience, one will understand that in a state of mind like that, the mannerisms they show will be unappealing, unpleasant and indeed inappropriate.

Normally, you would be taken aback in the event of your companion or friend expressing seemingly inappropriate gestures and mannerisms, thinking: 'How come my friend, who is normally so kind and says such nice loving words, now says things that are inappropriate? That doesn't seem right. Why is that so? That's totally unacceptable.' Rather than understanding and accepting that situation, you might get upset. Being upset yourself, your mannerisms in return will be unpleasant to the other. In this way, the relationship can be damaged.

Instead, one can use one's own experience to remind oneself of the need to practise patience. When one's companion or friend is expressing such inappropriate gestures and mannerisms, one can remind oneself: 'OK, they're not feeling so well. That's why they are expressing this behaviour. Normally they are a good, nice person. But now they must be feeling unwell. Thus I should try to be kind to them rather than being upset. I should try to help them by whatever means I can. I will not get upset with whatever they do.' When one thus decides not to get upset, that is the practice of patience.

Definition of patience:

The definition of patience given in the text is 'being able to withstand any kind of suffering or any kind of harm that may be inflicted by others'. Thus in the event of harm inflicted by others – or indeed any kind of suffering that one experiences – if one is able to tolerate it by not getting angry, then that is patience. When someone says inappropriate things or shows inappropriate gestures, one should not retaliate, not be upset, and instead show understanding and acceptance: that is what is called real patience in the true sense.

At the same time, although one may not retaliate verbally or physically, if one nevertheless feels upset and holds it inside, then that is not the practice of patience. From the conventional point of view, if one does not retaliate, it may appear that one is being patient. But if one is still upset and angry inside, it is not the actual practice of patience. The dividing line between patience and intolerance is whether one is upset or not.

The benefits of patience:

An important factor to take note of here is that the practice of patience is not really so much about the other as it is about oneself, in the sense of maintaining calmness and peace within oneself. If we were to compare an

individual who expressed their anger and retaliated immediately with someone who accepted the situation, stayed calm and did not retaliate, one would notice that the latter would be much more at peace. The conclusion here is that the practice of patience brings a real sense of calmness and peace within one. As much as it might help the other, the real beneficiary of the practice of patience is oneself. Even if one is only concerned with one's own well-being, one can see the benefit of the practice of patience.

According to the teachings, if one were to practice patience in this lifetime, there would definitely be great benefits and results in future lifetimes, such as having beautiful features, charming looks and so forth. But even if we left future lifetimes aside and reflected on the immediate benefits; if one is able to maintain a patient state of mind, one will definitely experience a sense of calmness and peace. Relating to the practical aspects of the practice, we can thus get a sense of how the Dharma is really beneficial for oneself and others.

It is important that we begin our practice by doing self-analysis, really looking within and finding out what is appropriate or inappropriate, rather than just looking outside and trying to find fault with others and with outer objects all the time. That will not take us very far. Looking within ourselves is the way to improve ourselves.

The benefits of meditation:

Coming back to the main point mentioned in the beginning, every attempt we make to have clear and bright state of mind would be really worthwhile, wouldn't it? We can be sure that anything that leads to a peaceful state of mind is essential for our wellbeing. Thus the practice of meditation, as a technique to develop this clear and bright state of mind, is most worthwhile for us to adopt in our life. Whether we have a busy life and an important job, or whether we are just an easy-going type of person, if we really look into what is it that we are all searching for, we can conclude that it is a general sense of well-being and peace within ourselves. The greatest potential we have as a human being is the ability to achieve that state. We have to acknowledge that we all have this potential. However, the reality is that even though we do experience some peace of mind periodically, it is yet very difficult for us to maintain it.

The main point I am making here is that we all experience a sense of calmness and peace within ourselves once in a while. Nevertheless it doesn't happen too often. We may ask: 'Why is that so? Since I seem to have a natural tendency to come into a calm, peaceful state, relaxed inner state, why can't I experience it more often?' If we were to look into it, we might begin by asking: 'Is it something given to me by someone else? Did someone implant it in me?' We could then conclude that our peace of mind is not something implanted in us by someone else. The next question is: 'If it is not implanted in me by someone else, can I can develop it myself?' Here, we would have to say, 'Yes, it is possible.' Although I didn't wait for your answer, I have answered for you that it is possible! *[laughter]*

The great potential within every human being:

The reason why it is possible to develop a peaceful, calm inner state is that we have the potential to do it. The definition of a person, according to the Tibetan Buddhist scriptures, is that who has the ability to communicate by expressing themselves, and who has the ability to understand – is a person. Thus a human is a being who has that ability to express themselves and has the cognitive ability to understand with the potential to develop their mind.

The Sanskrit word for person, which is *purushha*, has a connotation of having the potential. The literal meaning of the Sanskrit word is that which has the potential to further develop one's intelligence and so forth. The translation of the Tibetan word for a person, as mentioned earlier, is that which is able to communicate by expressing themselves in words and so forth, and which has the cognitive ability to understand.

The great Indian master Shantideva mentions that the uniqueness of a person – in this case a human being – is that one has the ability to distinguish between what is good for one and what is bad. Furthermore, one has the ability to adopt what is good for oneself and avoid what is bad.

Going back to the earlier point, if we can acquire a clear, bright state of mind it will lead to a peaceful state of mind, which is useful and beneficial: this is something that we can all understand. What we may not yet be able to clearly understand – but will through further self-analysis – is that what opposes a clear state of mind are the distractions that we are obsessed with. Being in a continually distracted state hinders the clarity and brightness of our mind. If we were to question why we follow distractions, it is because we don't exert ourselves enough effort in disciplining our mind. Because we are unable to discipline our mind, we are unable to protect it.

The Meditation Technique:

This is why we need to adopt the meditation technique, which involves intentionally withdrawing our mind from the distractions. For a short time, we don't allow our mind to follow its whims, what we call the conceptual thoughts. We make a commitment that, for the duration of the meditation, we will withdraw our mind from all thoughts, ideas and so forth, and just try to bring it inward. When we come to the point of successfully settling down our mind by withdrawing it from all the distractions, we will start to experience the sense of a bright, clear mind, which is followed by a very relaxed, soothing feeling.

When we are able to withdraw our mind from the distractions and maintain our full attention and focus on the internal focal object – which we have already chosen – that process is called meditation. The literal meaning of the Tibetan word for meditation –*gom* – is to familiarise oneself. Here the familiarisation or acquaintance is with the particular object one has chosen to focus on. As we familiarise ourselves by focusing on that object, we become more acquainted with keeping our mind centred, calm and peaceful.

Actually I don't need provide you with too many reasons and elaborate explanations to prove that meditation is useful to you, because many of you who have tried meditation have told me from your own experience that meditation is very relaxing, calming and soothing for the mind. When one adopts the proper technique and uses it to a certain extent, one will find out from one's own experience that: 'When I meditate, I have a calm peaceful mind. If I don't meditate then my mind is distracted and agitated.'

To adopt the meditation technique for the next few minutes, we will again readjust our physical posture and state of mind. We remind ourselves of the technique, which is to make the commitment to intentionally withdraw our mind from all distractions. Temporarily, we try to not be concerned with any of our other affairs. We just bring out mind, our focus inward. The object that we choose to focus on in our meditation technique here is our own breath. After we bring our focus inward and settle our mind, we then begin to focus on the breath. Here, we mean the internalised breath – mentally we imagine seeing the breath coming in and going out and place our full attention and 100% focus on the breath itself and nothing else. In this way, we will spend the next few minutes in meditation. [*Pause for meditation*] That will be sufficient for now; I will bring you out of your meditation now. Sorry!

The specifics of the technique:

In order to bring about real transformation and derive some benefit from meditation, one would need to practice consistently what we have just attempted in our short meditation session. We need to try to adopt a regular practice, to set some time aside every day for meditation. This is important if we are to get real benefit from the practice. No matter what we are doing, if we can set a few minutes aside every day saying 'this is my time for meditation' and really apply that discipline in one's daily life, one will begin to see the effect.

To engage in the practice of meditation properly, one needs to know the technique. In our tradition, the procedure for practice is this:

- One must first hear the instructions for meditation and understand what it is we are trying to get rid of from our mindstream, and what we are trying to adopt. That sound instruction is based on hearing the teachings, hearing the instructions. Although one gains a certain amount of wisdom from this, nevertheless if we just based our practice on someone telling us that meditation is good, it is not certain that we would get real benefit from the practice, and this level of understanding would not very stable.
- Thus, the next step is to *contemplate* or analyse what one has heard, to really try to validate it from one's own reasoning, logic and life experience.
- Based on the understanding we get from analysis and reasoning, we can then adopt the *practice* of meditation. This will ensure that our meditation becomes a sound, good practice. The understanding we gain from such meditation is said to be a valid, stable wisdom because it is based upon the process of

first hearing sound instructions, analysing and thinking about them, and then actually putting them into practice, testing them through one's own meditation practice.

This process is said to be a unique system of practice from the ancient Kadampa masters, specifically the main teacher of the Kadampa tradition or lineage, Atisha. To this day, we adopt this process of hearing, analysing, then meditating.

Conclusion:

To summarise the main points of this evening, if one can attempt to gain a calm and peaceful mind, that is the means for having a better understanding of, and thus better companionship with, others. We try to develop a real, genuine sense of companionship by developing our own peace of mind and sharing it with others. While we work on gaining a calm and peaceful mind for ourselves, we can also look at how that can assist and benefit others. Those are the two main points. My request is that you try to make an attempt to implement these key points in your life.

Before we end this session for the evening, we will again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time, the object of our focus is the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. Just keep your attention on the sound as it is chanted.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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