
The Condensed Lam Rim



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As usual it will be good to spend sometime in meditation. For the purpose of meditation, and in accordance with the advice given in the teachings for sitting in the seven point Buddha Vairochana's posture, try to sit in an upright comfortable position for oneself.

It is good to reflect upon why we are doing the practice of meditation. What kinds of goals are we seeking to achieve with the practice of meditation? It is good to reflect upon the practical benefits of meditation and how it protects the mind from negative states of mind or negative attitudes. We can all relate to negative attitudes. Negative attitudes are any thoughts that, when they arise in our mind, disturb the peace of our mind. No matter what we may be doing it feels unsettled. With an unsettled state of mind you don't feel altogether comfortable even when you are eating, when you are conversing with others or when you go about your normal activities. In every instance one feels weighed down. That is the result of negative states of mind or attitudes being prevalent in one's mind. It has the effect of weighing down the mind. The regular practice of meditation helps to relieve that weighed down feeling in one's mind and uplifts one's mind to be clearer and more focussed.

The further benefit of meditation is that it will help to maintain within oneself an attitude of kindness towards others. One's own benefit is that it helps to subdue the mind from negative states. That is how we can see its benefits.

It is good to reflect upon the different kinds of attitude within our mind. In general, we can categorise the positive and negative attitudes within us. Each has many further divisions.

While we can relate to the positive affects of maintaining a positive attitude within our mind we find that negative states seem to have an upper hand. They seem to be more prevalent and spontaneous within oneself. These are states such as annoyance, getting upset or angry, feeling desire for something, jealousy, a sense of competitiveness with others, envy and so forth. We will notice that when any of these negative states of mind are prevalent within us they immediately disturb the calmness and peace within our mind. As a result one feels disturbed. It is good to relate to one's own experience of how they affect us and that this is a true experience for oneself.

If we allow our mind to be influenced by negative states of mind we are giving control of our mind to those negative states. What we need to attempt is to be in control of our own mind by not allowing it to be controlled by the negative states. We need to be in control ourselves.

If we focus on analysing the state of our mind in meditation, then due to that familiarity we will be able to detect the states of our mind even outside of our meditation session, such as when we are engaged in normal activities. For example, when anger arises in our mind we will be able to detect it immediately and think, 'OK. My mind is now

feeling uncomfortable and I'm getting upset. I have to be careful here because if I allow my mind to be dominated by anger it will have negative consequences for me and others'.

That awareness will help prevent anger from escalating. It is similar with the other negative states of mind such as desire and so forth. If we are able to detect it early, it will help to prevent the intensity and thus minimize the negative effects of that negative state of mind. This is definitely a benefit to us.

This is how we should utilise the practice of meditation in our daily lives. While we are naturally protected from negative states of mind during the formal practice of meditation we normally don't pay much attention outside of meditation. Thus, we find ourselves once again under the control of the negative states of mind. But the more familiarity we have with the particular practice of using the intelligence within us, what is referred to as analytical wisdom, the more we will be able to protect our mind even when we are out of the meditation practice.

The reason we choose a virtuous object to focus on in meditation, is so that we can cultivate and increase virtue within oneself. Using a virtuous object in our practice of our meditation and becoming familiar with that object means it will be easier for us to acquaint ourselves with virtue even when we are out of the meditation session. Because of the acquaintance or familiarity during the practice of meditation it becomes easier to practise outside of formal meditation. If we can acquaint ourselves in having a virtuous mind even outside of the meditation session, then it will be easier for us to actually engage in virtue or positive deeds in our daily lives. In that way, the more we acquaint ourselves with virtue, the fewer problems and the less negativity we will experience.

Having explained the benefits of meditation practice, we can now actually make the attempt to engage in the practice. As we readjust our physical posture it is also important to set our mind. We prepare our mind for the practice of meditation by generating a positive motivation or a positive attitude. When we generate the motivation for the practice we are actually setting goals for ourselves. Generating the motivation in turn is reminding us what the goals are for the practice of meditation.

So, we can remind ourselves of the technique for the practice of meditation, which is first to set a positive state of mind, that is primarily generating a kind mind as a means to develop compassion. This is the main purpose for doing the practice. Then, the actual technique involves intentionally withdrawing our mind from all discursive thoughts, from all external or internal objects that we normally engage in. For the purpose of the practice, it is initially important that we withdraw from focussing on any other object, whether they be good or bad. One should withdraw from all forms of distracting thoughts or objects and just try to bring one's focus inward.

As a result of withdrawing from all conceptions and centring our mind within, one will initially feel a sense of relief from the preoccupations of the busy mind. When one experiences that relief there will be also a sense of joy, the boon of the joy of meditation or the bliss of meditation. When one experiences this initial sense of relief and joy within one's mind it is good to just remain in that state for a few moments. Because we lack the familiarity to remain in that quiet and blissful state for long, we need to have an object to focus on. The object that we choose for this particular technique is our own breath. So having initially focussed on

just remaining in that sense of joy for a while we then focus on our breath and try to maintain our focus one hundred percent on the breath itself. We can spend the next few minutes in this way. (*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

4.2.2.1.2.2.2.1. Teaching the measure of having produced a pure mind that strives for liberation

We can come out of our meditation now. It has been a while since we have been able to cover the text material. So, tonight we will attempt to continue from the text. In our last session the topic we covered was the section where the definition of renunciation was given. Renunciation is described in the teaching as an unceasing and spontaneous wish to be free from cyclic existence and thus striving towards achieving liberation. That is the definition of renunciation that has been given. We didn't cover too many details but that is how it was defined.

In relation to the part where it says striving towards achieving liberation in the definition of renunciation, it would be good to understand what liberation means. Liberation is a state where one is free from the bindings of karma and delusions. What that implies is that for as long as one is bound by karma and delusions one is in cyclic existence. To be in the cyclic existence means to be under the influence of karma and delusions. In our present existence we don't have much control over the negative states of our mind, what we call the delusions. They seem to be unceasingly and uncontrollably arising in our mind. Due to the influence of the delusions we uncontrollably create actions that are called karma. That is what it means to be bound by karma and delusions. We don't seem to have any control over that right now.

That is the actual mechanism or the effect of cyclic existence within oneself. However, when we refer to external cyclic existence that usually implies the environment that we live in. Even in the external sense, when we look into the pleasures that we derive from external objects, it may initially seem that one is experiencing some joy and happiness, but it doesn't last and in fact turns into suffering. Thus there is no real essence, no real value, in the pleasures of cyclic existence. Many people seem to experience that. Many people seem to agree with the point that while we think we are in control, in fact we are bound by cyclic existence. With a certain amount of experience we seem to notice that it is not the source of real happiness or real contentment. When one gets that sense then one is getting an inkling that there is no real essence or value in cyclic existence. When one begins to notice the futility of samsara, then one begins to understand what it means to wish to be free from samsara and to develop renunciation.

To give an example of cyclic existence on a personal level; the actual cyclic existence is not related to the external environment but rather to one's own contaminated aggregates. It refers to one's contaminated physical aggregates and contaminated mental states. What we have experienced so far in relation to our physical aggregates is that we have many wants and needs. One is never satiated. We can never really please the body as it has so many needs and wants. Even though it is a cause for so many pains and aches, we are still bound to it. We cannot do without this body.

We are completely bound to the body and to states of our mind. While we notice and experience that this is in an unsatisfactory state, nevertheless we seem to be completely bound by it. Being bound by cyclic existence means to be completely under the control of the contaminated aggregates. When we begin to notice the shortcomings of the contaminated aggregates within us and that there is a possibility to be free from that, to obtain a state where one is not bound by delusions and karma, then this is something one would wish for. Achieving an uncontaminated or pure body that is not bound by karma and delusions and is free from all the defects is something that is possible.

That is how we should be understood cyclic existence in relation to oneself. It is the very contaminated aggregates that we possess and are bound by. Uncontrollably grasping onto such a body and mind, the aggregates, is being bound by cyclic existence.

We can reflect further on the unsatisfactory nature of our aggregates. If we relate to the physical aggregate, which is our bodies, we experience different kinds of ailments such as headaches, pains, aches and diseases. Because we have a contaminated body to begin with we have all these other unwanted experiences. If we didn't have a contaminated body we would not have to experience illness and so forth. Because of its very nature our contaminated physical body is prone to the unwanted sufferings that we experience. We need to depend on food to maintain the body. But if we have too much food, or food that is disagreeable to us, we'll be sick. If we don't eat we experience hunger, but if we overeat we experience pain and disease. If we don't drink we have the suffering of thirst, but if we drink too much that is a problem as well. Similarly we can go on with endless discomforts and sufferings. If we don't wear anything we suffer from cold, but if we wear too much we suffer from heat. In this way our body is prone to many unsatisfactory states.

When we investigate at a physical level we can get a sense of how, because of the contaminated nature of the body, we experience so many unwanted sufferings. If we can recognise that our contaminated aggregates are a source of suffering, if we get a deep understanding of that, we can begin to understand that the things that contribute to the maintenance of the physical aggregates are also in the nature of suffering. Without first understanding the contaminated aggregates as being the source of suffering it will be quite impossible to relate to the other factors that contribute to maintenance of the aggregates as being in the nature of suffering. This is important to understand.

Once we can relate to the body as being the source of suffering then we can develop the wish to achieve a state where one is not dependent on the contaminated aggregates and one can be completely free from the dominance of delusions and karma. That would be a desirable state and something which we can assert, 'If it is possible then definitely I would want to achieve such a state.'

When we relate to the various defects of the contaminated aggregates in detail in this way we are beginning to get a deeper understanding of the Truth of Suffering within the Four Noble Truths. If we can relate to our contaminated aggregates to the Truth of Suffering then the spontaneous wish to overcome the causes of the contaminated aggregates will arise in one's mind. This is getting an understanding of the Truth of Origination, the Second Noble Truth.

Lama Tsong Khapa then explains how, in order to develop a genuine sense renunciation, one needs to have a deep

understanding of the true nature of our contaminated aggregates which are in the nature of suffering. What Lama Tsong Khapa is emphasising here is that if one does not have a genuine, deep sense of renunciation then the wish to be free from cyclic existence will also be very superficial. It should be a really deep, genuine longing to be free from cyclic existence. Without this strong wish, renunciation will not be very stable.

The text quotes a great Kadampa master Sharawa, where he uses an analogy for shallow renunciation. He says, if you were to sprinkle a little bit of *tsampa* (Tibetan staple diet of roasted barley flour) on some *chang* (Tibetan rice-beer) then from a distance it may seem that there is a substantial meal, but in fact it would not serve as a substantial meal at all because the *tsampa* is just the skim on the top. It is similar if the sense of wishing to be free from true suffering and wanting to overcome the origin of suffering is weak then renunciation will also be very shallow. It would not be very deep. Lama Tsong Khapa further explains that if one has only a very shallow understanding of True Sufferings then, as a result, the wish to be free from the True Origins will be weak and thus the wish to achieve the Truth of Cessation which is liberation, will also be very shallow.

As Lama Tsong Khapa explained if one does not develop a keen, deep sense of longing to achieve the Truth of Cessation then even if one were to claim that one is seeking liberation then beside the mere words it would not be a genuine wish to obtain liberation. If one does not have that true, deep longing to be free from cyclic existence and wishing to achieve liberation oneself then, in turn, the wish for others to be free from the sufferings of cyclic existence will also be very, very shallow. It cannot happen. What is being emphasised is that the sense of love towards other sentient beings is developed on the basis of fully understanding the pitfalls and sufferings of cyclic existence upon oneself. Without developing renunciation within oneself there is no way that one can develop a true sense of love and compassion for others. If one lacks a true sense of love and compassion towards other sentient beings, the altruistic wish to achieve enlightenment for the sake of liberating all other sentient beings, which is the state of mind called bodhicitta, definitely cannot come about. To claim to be a Great Vehicle or a Mahayana practitioner whilst one lacks compassion and bodhicitta towards others, is just mere words. One is not practising the great deeds of the path in the true sense.

The explanation given by Lama Tsong Khapa is a very unique, genuine, explanation of the true manner to develop love and compassion and bodhicitta. It is based on first developing a genuine sense of renunciation oneself. If one does not understand the nature of suffering in relation to oneself there is no way one could understand it in others. In contrast, if one has developed a genuine understanding of the pitfalls and shortcomings of cyclic existence in general, and particularly the sufferings of oneself, then that can be genuinely developed as compassion when one relates it to others.

It is said that love and compassion focusing upon others and based on the true understanding of the nature of the sufferings of cyclic existence or samsara, is a very profound sense of love and compassion towards others. This is because it is relatively easier for us to feel compassion when we see others suffering in an obvious way. However, when we see others doing quite well we don't really have much sense of compassion for them. Once we have a deep and profound understanding of the entire range of sufferings in

relation to cyclic existence then when one relates to others one can have a true, deep sense of love and compassion due to understanding the true nature of the sufferings of samsara.

When one gets a true understanding of the shortcomings of cyclic existence then one will have definitely have a genuine sense of love and compassion towards others. If from one's own experience one has had an experience of a profound unease then, based on one's own experience, it is easier to relate to others unease and discomfort. That is something we can understand. The sense of wishing to help the other will naturally become stronger within oneself because one has had the experience oneself. If someone has never experienced a stomach ache, then if one's friend is going through the difficulty of having a stomach ache one may not fully understand their suffering because one has not had the experience. One may even laugh it off. However, if one has had the experience one can immediately relate to the disease and extend whatever help to overcome their discomfort.

There are many stories I can relate to you about this fact. The suffering a mother has to endure in childbirth is only fully understood and comprehended by another mother who has had the experience of having a child herself. Otherwise you can only imagine what it may be like but you can not completely relate to it. When someone has gone through the pains of labour she can immediately relate to someone else who is going through that unease. Through her own experience she can relate to them and comfort them and try to extend whatever she can.

This is another example of how, based upon one's own experience, one can relate with and understand what others are going through. When one relates to one's own experiences of pain one has a deeper understanding of the other's pain and through that wanting to extend help. Another way we can learn from our own experience of pain and suffering is understanding what may have caused that pain and suffering. If it is in relation to the attitudes of others we can know how that pain is caused. We can then try to prevent inflicting the same sort of pain upon others. Having gone through the pain and suffering oneself can help protect us from harming others and inflicting the same pain and suffering upon them. We can learn from that.

The main point being made here is that one can learn much from having gone through difficulties, hardship and so forth. One gains much from that experience. His Holiness the Dalai Lama himself has said the best lesson he has learned in his life is from enduring great hardships. The great hardships that he has experienced in his life have become a great source of learning for him. It is quite remarkable for him to say that.

Before we conclude for the evening we can spend a few more minutes in meditation. This time as we bring our focus inward, we maintain our focus on the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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