
The Condensed Lam Rim

ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བཞུགས་སྒྲོལ།

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It would be good to spend some time in meditation as usual. As we normally do, find an appropriate, relaxed physical posture for meditation.

We have already had many explanations about the technique of meditation, so we don't need to go over that specifically. However it is good to reflect upon the main purpose of doing meditation, which is to provide a calm, relaxed state of mind. It definitely brings about this result.

Relating to our own experience with meditation, whenever we attempt to withdraw our mind from distractions and focus inwardly, we know that this contributes to developing a bright, clear state of mind. This results in a peaceful, calm state of mind, enabling us to utilise even our external conditions to achieving happiness for ourselves. Another benefit is that meditation will help us to maintain a sense of inner wellbeing, a real sense of feeling contented and happy.

While you may agree with this, you may still wonder whether it is possible to maintain that clear, bright state of mind. It is worthwhile for us to investigate how we can achieve that. I feel that having a positive state of mind contributes to our mental clarity and brightness. The more we develop positive attitudes, the clearer and brighter our mind becomes. Whereas the more we familiarise our mind with negative attitudes, the more withdrawn and incompetent we will feel.

It is very important for us not to feel discouraged and lose our self-confidence. If we have a state of mind where we feel incompetent or incapable of doing something, then that will cause us to become withdrawn.

Reducing the negative attitudes within ourselves will definitely contribute to our well-being. One reason why we are unable to maintain a positive attitude and fall victim to negative attitudes is that we are normally under the influence of distractions. Allowing our mind to focus entirely on external distractions causes the mind to feel disturbed. If we can reverse that situation by bringing our focus inward and maintaining this internal focus, that will prevent us being influenced by the distractions; instead, the distractions will start to naturally subside. When we engage in this process, we will be able to identify for ourselves the main causes of the disturbances in our mind.

Familiarising ourselves with the technique of withdrawing our mind from the distractions, focusing internally, and maintaining our focus upon a chosen object enhances the mind's ability to analyse what is

negative and positive. Thus our analytical wisdom increases as well.

First, we need to make that commitment to withdraw our mind from distractions. We intentionally withdraw the mind from all preoccupations, thoughts and external distractions and bring our focus inward. This action in itself will induce a blissful state of mind called the 'boon of bliss'. It is good to remain for a short period just experiencing that blissful feeling or sensation. Then we can bring our attention and focus to the breath. As we breathe in and out naturally, we just try to maintain our focus on that internalised image of the breath. In this way, we will spend the next few minutes in meditation. *(Pause for meditation)*

That might be sufficient for now. As we have just attempted, please try to continue the practice of meditation daily. Practising meditation is an essential technique also for maintaining a sense of kindness and concern for others; and this is really important.

I consider the attitude of kindness and the wish to benefit others as a very valuable state of mind, and I normally encourage people to develop this attitude in their life as much as possible. The more we can enhance the attitude of kindness and wishing to benefit others, the more we will reduce our intention to harm others. So as a direct benefit, this state of mind will reduce harm to others. Relating to our own experience, when we have an overriding wish to benefit others, this will naturally prevent us having any intention to harm them. The wish to harm them cannot naturally reside in our mind alongside the overriding wish to benefit them.

So we can see that how this mind contributes to good relationships with others. A good relationship is very much based on a mutual wish to benefit each other. If there is this natural wish to help and benefit each other at all times, that will definitely enhance good communication and thus the relationship. This extends beyond your immediate relationships with your partner to any kind of relationship or communication with others. Even animals can recognise and appreciate the attitude of wishing to benefit others, not to mention human beings. Thus we can definitely relate to the positive effects of this state of mind.

I consider the main criterion of a good relationship between a boyfriend and girlfriend to be the mutual wish to benefit each other; I don't know what criteria you would consider essential. I particularly relate this advice to the younger generation, and often suggest to them that when they seek a relationship with others, it is worthwhile to not just consider the outer appearance, such as facial beauty. When someone relates only to another's external appearance as a criterion for developing a friendship, later, after they have invested much time and energy in the relationship, I often hear them complain that their partner is inconsiderate and short-tempered. But it is a bit too late to make these complaints after one has been engaged in such a relationship for a while!

In summary, if we were to consider the element that brings about short-term benefits in this life or long-term benefits in future lives, in all instances the element that

contributes to our wellbeing is the attitude of kindness, which is based on the wish to benefit others and the wish to refrain from harming them. The more we enhance that state of mind – of wishing to benefit others and reduce harming them – the greater the sense of true happiness and joy we will feel. Therefore I normally recommend that developing this attitude is really worthwhile. A person with such an attitude will naturally be inclined to help others and intentionally refrain from harming them. Such a person is considered as a valuable, trustworthy person in all situations, even if it is in a community or in a group.

Indeed, the essence of all eighty-four branches of the Buddha's teachings can be subsumed into two main qualities: the wish to benefit others, and the wish to refrain from harming them. This is really the essence of the teachings. It is good to reflect on this; it is something we are capable of developing to whatever extent we can. This is an answer to queries such as: 'I am interested in practising Dharma, but how do I actually begin to practise?' Individuals who have these queries also tend to believe that perhaps the Dharma is something that has to be achieved externally. However, Dharma involves developing the qualities of kindness and non-harm within oneself.

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

4.2.2.1.2.2.4. Resolving the nature of the path that leads to liberation

4.2.2.1.2.2.4.2. The actual resolution of the nature of the path

In the textbook, we come to the fourth subdivision from an earlier category; this subdivision is called 'Resolving the nature of the path that leads to liberation'.

In the explanation under this heading, we find that the essence of the path to liberation is the attitude of non-violence, as I mentioned earlier. The wish to intentionally refrain from harming others is called the practice of morality or ethics; the definition of ethics is the wish to refrain from harming others. The rest of the practices are based on developing such an attitude first. We can definitely see how the Buddhist teachings are said to be based on ethics and non-violence; we can get an understanding of non-violence as the essence of the doctrine.

As explained earlier in the text, by reflecting on the faults of cyclic existence and then meditating on them, one will develop the strong state of mind of wishing to be free from cyclic existence and strive for liberation. Such a state of mind is called renunciation. When we develop renunciation, we must apply the techniques for overcoming cyclic existence, also called samsara. As explained here, the more we reflect on the nature of cyclic existence – the nature of the suffering, the faults of the cyclic existence, and so forth – the stronger our wish to be free from such a state.

This subdivision has two further subdivisions: the kind of life that will support one to overturn cyclic existence, and the kinds of paths one must cultivate in order to overturn cyclic existence. With these two subdivisions, what is

being presented is, how once we have developed the keen strong wish to be free, then we would naturally to look into the possibility of being free; what are the conditions needed to free oneself? So, the particular type of life needed in order to be overcome cyclic existence is presented. Once we have these conditions, then one must apply certain kinds of techniques, which are called the path, in order to overturn cyclic existence. So this is what the text is relating to.

When we look at the way the teachings are presented, we can see how the topics are presented systematically: the later topics are all related to the earlier topics, which enhances one's ability to use reasoning. When a later presentation is given based on the logic of a point mentioned earlier, one is able to grasp the meaning of the later presentation. This increases our ability to apply our own reasoning and analysis.

The two subheadings, the kind of life through which one is able to overturn cyclic existence, and the kind of path that one must cultivate to overturn cyclic existence, logically derive from the main heading ('Resolving the nature of the path that leads to liberation'). When one reaches the point where one has a genuine, strong wish to be free from cyclic existence, one will naturally be interested in knowing the kind of life one needs to overturn cyclic existence. One would want to know if one has the right conditions in relation to one's life, then what kind of path one needs to cultivate, in order to overturn the cyclic existence.

The text explains that the kind of life needed to overturn cyclic existence is a human life that has the eight liberties and ten endowments intact. Thus as a human being, the perfect conditions one needs are having the eight liberties and ten endowments, which make one's life a suitable vessel for achieving liberation.

The text then quotes from Nagarjuna: 'To be reborn with wrong views and so forth, is to be afflicted by one of the eight faults that are the conditions which lack leisure. So after you have obtained leisure which is freedom from these rebirths, strive to end birth'. As explained here, when one is free from the conditions of being reborn in an unfortunate states, and one is reborn as a human being with all faculties intact, that serves as the best condition for one to have the leisure or time to engage in cultivating the means to strive for liberation.

As one of my late teachers, Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche, used to say, 'We have obtained the leisures, but somehow even when we have the leisures, we seem to make ourselves so busy as to not find any time [to strive for liberation]'. So we have the leisure and the time: it is a matter of us utilising that time and leisure. In fact we seem to do the opposite, making ourselves even busier. The specific point made in the text is that we have obtained the eight leisures – but it seems that we also have a ninth one, which is busyness!

The eight freedoms and ten endowments were explained earlier in detail. Furthermore, it was explained how it is very difficult for us to obtain all these perfect conditions, so once we have obtained them, we should utilise them to obtain the ultimate purpose for ourselves. As was

explained earlier, one needs to use them to strive for liberation.

In relation to the eight freedoms or leisures, we can relate to the freedoms of our human rebirth compared with rebirth to an animal. We can clearly see the distinction – how we have much better conditions, particularly in relation to gaining more knowledge and understanding, compared to the limited abilities of an animal. So even relating to one of these freedoms, we can see how not being born as an animal is really a great fortune, a great leisure for us right now.

Having reflected on these points, one needs to resolve how one will utilise these perfect conditions right now for achieving the ultimate purpose. As the great master Shantideva mentioned in his work, *Bodhicharyavatara*: ‘Having been like a servant to our own body, clothing it and feeding it and so forth – having spent our entire life and energy in trying to maintain this body, now it is time for us to actually use the body, to give the body some work to do to obtain our ultimate purpose’.

When we think about it, what Shantideva said is very true. We have spent our entire life up to now serving the body, feeding it the best kind of nourishment and food, giving it the best clothing, trying to secure a good house for it: when we think about it, we have spent almost our entire life looking after this body. So now it is time that we used the body to achieve a higher purpose. These are important points for us to consider; the reality of our situation will provide an impetus to engage in practice. If we were to calculate how much money we have spent on this body, it would be quite an expense. Thus, because we have already spent so much time and energy maintaining this body, the most worthwhile, appropriate way to use it is for achieving the great purpose.

As the text explains further, if we were to ask when would be the appropriate time to use this body as a cause to achieve liberation, the answer is right now. The text quotes from a great yogi, saying, ‘Now is the time to differentiate ourselves from domestic animals’. This also relates to what Shantideva mentioned in his text: ‘What differentiates us from animals is our unique intelligence’. As human beings, our unique intelligence differentiates us from animals, but if we don’t use that intelligence, our lives would not be much different to those of animals – striving for mere survival in this life. If we utilised our ultimate potential, we would really make our life different from animals.

The text further quotes from the great Kadampa master Potowa: ‘For as long as we have wandered through cyclic existence, it has not stopped by itself. Given this, it will not stop by itself now either. We must put a stop to it, and the time to do so is today, when we have obtained leisure and opportunity’. What Potowa is referring to that there is no time where we could say: ‘I had not been in cyclic existence prior to this time’. Until now we have been wandering in cyclic existence. If we just let our situation be as it is now, there is nothing to say we will not continue to experience rebirth and cyclic existence. What is being pointed out is that if we don’t apply the methods to stop cyclic existence and strive for liberation, we will not be able to naturally just come out of it. And

the right time to apply the methods is now, when we have obtained these leisures and opportunities as mentioned.

As mentioned earlier, these points are raised to challenge the complacent thought that we might obtain the leisures and great opportunity in the future, but that is said to be questionable. It is really very rare to have all these opportunities, and since such a life is so difficult to obtain; now that we have it, it is the time to utilise it.

The practical advice one needs to derive from this teaching is that as human beings, we all have the great potential to achieve whatever goals we seek. One goal for us as human beings is to eliminate the suffering we experience and achieve whatever happiness is obtainable as a human being. We have the capacity to overcome the human suffering we experience; we are not talking about the obscure sufferings, but rather the suffering experienced by ourselves as humans. We have the ability to overcome it. Furthermore, we have the right to do so. In the West, we are very keen on human rights. Since we have the potential and since we have the right to eliminate suffering and achieve the greatest happiness, there shouldn’t be anything to stop us from achieving that. That understanding should encourage us and prevent us from feeling low self-esteem or feeling like we are not capable. It is a way to encourage us to achieve our goals.

Another point being made here is the right to seek the ultimate happiness of liberation. When one seeks the happiness of liberation, the other kinds of happiness – what we call the temporary happiness in relation to our wellbeing now – comes as a by-product. If we are able to really focus on achieving our goals and strive towards liberation, we would not need to worry too much about temporary happiness, because that comes about as a by-product. However even if one is unable to incorporate that sense of achieving liberation in one’s life right now, one can understand that if liberation or ultimate happiness is possible through this human condition, there is no need to mention that other kinds of goals are definitely achievable.

Thus, in every instance, this teaching points to the great potential we have, which should be a great solace in our everyday life, and contribute to our wellbeing. It is good for us to really try to derive this practical advice from these teachings.

Before we conclude for the evening, we can spend a few more minutes in meditation. This time, as we bring our focus inwards and maintain a focused state of mind, we focus on the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni’s mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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