
The Condensed Lam Rim

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14 October 2009

As usual it would be good to spend some time in meditation. In order to engage in meditation one needs to first find a relaxed, appropriate posture. As we adopt a relaxed posture, which is relatively easy to do, what we are really attempting to gain from the practice of meditation is a sense of happiness and joy in one's mind. That is what we are really striving for. In fact whatever activity we do, that is what we are striving for.

Even though we may be able to relax physically, we find it is difficult to really gain that sense of happiness and joy in the mind. If one can also have a relaxed and peaceful state of mind then that will definitely contribute to a happy and joyous person. That is something that we all wish to achieve. If that is something that we wish to achieve and obtain for ourselves then isn't it worthwhile that we consider how to obtain that?

Firstly we should consider why, even though we may be able to relax physically, our mind is still in turmoil and is not able to fully relax and become peaceful. We would find the answers lie in many different reasons.

One of the factors that prevent a happy, relaxed and peaceful state of mind is having a distracted mind. Even though we may be able to find a somewhat relaxed physical posture we notice that our mind is still not relaxed. If we were to look into this we would notice that while we have a composed physical posture our mind is not able to remain in that relaxed physical state. Instead the mind is constantly busy and is completely overwhelmed with a lot of distractions. The mind is constantly distracted by external factors and that then contributes to the mind being in turmoil.

Since we can consider ourselves to be intelligent, we have the ability to reason, use logic and understand things, we have that capacity to look into this and recognise the connection between a distracted mind and a disturbed mind. If we can recognise that an agitated and disturbed mind is caused by a distracted mind, then on the other hand we will be able to reason that if the mind was focused, that would naturally contribute to a more relaxed and settled mind. This how one needs to identify the technique.

When we begin to identify and recognise that equation, we will naturally be more inclined and interested to look into the methods for withdrawing our mind from distractions and trying to maintain a focused mind. When we are able to identify the relationship between a withdrawn and focused mind, (withdrawn meaning withdrawing our mind from the distractions and maintaining a focus on an internalised object) and a more

settled and peaceful mind, then we will become more inclined and interested into looking into the methods for achieving this.

The teachings present two ultimate methods for maintaining focus on an internalised object. They are mindfulness and introspection. These two mental factors serve as the main tools for maintaining focus on the internalised object that we choose. Mindfulness is a mental factor that serves as means to recall the object that we are focusing on by constantly bringing the object to mind. Being constantly aware of the object that we have chosen is the function of mindfulness. The mental factor of introspection has the particular function of checking whether our mind is maintaining the focus on the object or not, and if the mind were to become distracted, to notice that and bring attention back upon the object. The mental factor of introspection is like a spy checking whether our mind is becoming distracted. Applying these two mental tools, mindfulness and introspection, is the ultimate technique for maintaining our focus on an internalised object.

When we have been introduced to the technique we are able to apply the appropriate tools, mindfulness and introspection. These are nothing more than mental factors we already have within ourselves. It is a matter of identifying them and actually using them in our practice. There's no question that anyone who has identified these tools and uses them for the purpose of meditation will experience for himself or herself a settled mind. As one focuses on the object and uses these tools one will notice for oneself that the mind naturally subsides and becomes much more tranquil. That is definitely the result of the practice of meditation.

When one uses the tools for the practice of meditation, one will notice that if one had earlier experienced a mind full of worries and disturbances, even to the extent of it becoming a destructive mind, one will now experience the complete opposite. The mind will now be more settled and naturally tranquil. Therefore one will begin to verify for oneself, from one's own experience, the effectiveness of the meditation technique.

The great master Atisha mentioned, 'our ultimate friend is mindfulness and introspection'. He has introduced mindfulness and introspection as the ultimate friend, for they are a means to prevent our mind from becoming completely chaotic and distracted and give us a sense of control over ourselves. Thus they become our inner protection and unfailing friend. This is what Atisha was describing.

Furthermore, the great, kind teacher Buddha Shakyamuni has also mentioned that 'a subdued mind is a happy mind'. We have, perhaps, heard this phrase before. However, when we have not had the experience of a subdued mind we might not be able to relate to these words. It may just be a mere saying. But through one's own efforts and the practice of meditation and actually experiencing a subdued tranquil mind, this saying from Buddha Shakyamuni comes alive in its truth. One can be confident that what the Buddha has mentioned is a truth, not just mere words. With a bit of experience from one's own meditation, even the mere mentioning of the phrase

'a subdued mind is a happy mind' will carry great weight in its meaning. Even reciting those words after one has an experience of a subdued mind will be meaningful.

This quote from Buddha Shakyamuni can help us in our daily lives. As soon as one notices that one's mind starts to get a little bit agitated, perhaps a bit wild at times and disturbed, one can immediately relate to the Buddha's words. Recognising that the opposite of what the Buddha said is also true. If a subdued mind equates a happy mind, then an unsubdued mind equates to an unhappy, disturbed mind. Even those words can be a solace to one and one will be able to remind oneself, 'Well, if I have disturbed mind it is a result of my own unsubdued mind. Thus I must make every attempt to subdue my mind.'

It is very important for us to be able to detect the real, ultimate cause for our disturbances and unhappy mind is an unsubdued mind. This means that the causes of our unhappy, disturbed mind lie within us. It is very important that we are able to recognise and fully accept it for ourselves. Otherwise we go back into the old habits of blaming some external factors for our unhappiness. Because of our habituation with thinking that some external factor is the cause for our unhappiness, we immediately find something to blame. For as long as we do that, we are missing the point of finding the real cause of our problems.

As one begins to understand how the meditation technique works one should be able to apply it to every circumstance that becomes a cause for disturbance. Meditation is not limited to just focusing on one object. In fact it is said there is an antidote for overcoming every disturbance, every problem.

We can give a few examples. When we encounter a beautiful object, what disturbs our mind is the attachment or desire that arises in our own mind. If we give in to our attachment or desire then, to that extent, it will disturb our mind further. For as long as our mind is dominated or influenced by strong attachment or desire then, to that extent, it will become very disturbed.

How does one protect oneself and reverse that situation so our mind is not disturbed by attachment? One chooses to focus on an object that does not cause attachment to arise in the mind. Rather than focusing on the attractive, beautiful object we immediately switch our focus to an object that causes the factor of non-attachment, non-desire to manifest. To focus on such an object will naturally subside and calm our mind. This is how we need to understand the technique.

We could use another example that causes a disturbance such as anger. For as long as we focus on an object that causes us anger, our anger will increase. Instead we could focus on an object of compassion. The more we familiarise ourselves with feeling compassion, anger will naturally be reduced.

Some people may have difficulty in having faith in the objects of refuge. If our mind is disturbed with a lot of doubt and a lack of faith we can try to focus on those factors that cause faith to arise in the mind. Faith will then increase in our mind.

By understanding these few examples one should be able to apply meditation to every circumstance that causes disturbance. It's a matter of changing one's attitude and focus. The more we familiarise ourselves with the positive object, the influence of the negative object will naturally be reduced. The familiarisation comes through the practice of meditation.

Familiarising ourselves with the meditation technique is a supreme way to prepare us in the event of actual problems arising. Even though we may not be facing problems or difficulties right now, it is nevertheless worthwhile that we familiarise ourselves with the practice of meditation. One must understand meditation in a very broad sense. It includes many different techniques to work with our mind to develop positive attitudes. Regardless of the situation, we try to use our mind in a positive way.

As we familiarise ourselves with these techniques then, when an actual real problem arises, even though externally there may be a difficulty and problems one will still be able to maintain a very calm demeanour. That will definitely be possible. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama says, and he would be relating to his own experiences, when one familiarises oneself with the proper techniques then even in the most grave, difficult situations one will still be able to maintain some sort of serenity and calmness in one's mind. This is something that is definitely possible.

The benefits are twofold. It helps to remove difficulties in the mind and one will also be able to maintain calmness in one's mind.

The more we contemplate the technique of meditation and the positive results that applying the technique of meditation brings, the more it will become a means for us to develop a real sense of confidence and trust in what we call the Dharma; spiritual practice in the Buddhist context. One will develop confidence and trust that the Dharma is not merely an external protection, but rather a real inner protection. By developing oneself internally and transforming oneself internally one is developing the Dharma within oneself. That becomes the real protection for one self. That sort of confidence will develop within oneself.

Thus along with trust, a natural faith or respect towards the Dharma will develop. As we develop that faith and respect towards the Dharma then as a consequence it will be easy for us to develop a natural respect towards anyone who has developed some level of understanding of Dharma, which comes with some level of spiritual transformation within their mind. This is how from our own experiences we will be able to develop trust and faith in the Dharma.

The general definition of dharma that is given in the texts is 'that which holds its own identity'. In that sense it applies to all existence, to everything in the broadest sense. However, when the definition of Dharma is applied to the spiritual context, then it means 'that which holds virtue in the mind'. Particularly that which overcomes negativities, and adheres to ethics and virtue, is what is referred to as inner-Dharma. That is the real meaning that one derives from the definition of Dharma.

Relating to the definition of dharma in the broader sense, 'that which holds its own identity', for example, if we relate it to the clock; the clock withholds its own identity because of the fact whoever relates to it will be able to identify it as a clock, not something else. Whenever we see the clock or relate to the clock in any way, as soon as we see it we immediately refer to it as clock. The fact that we are able to relate to it as a 'clock' is because it holds its own identity of a clock. So, this applies to all other phenomena.

Having related to the earlier technique and benefits and so forth of meditation, we can now conclude that the practice of meditation is something worthwhile. Wouldn't you agree? If at this point one agrees with these explanations and resolves upon this as being true and meaningful the next step to take is to actually apply it in practice. Otherwise just the mere agreement with the practice of meditation being worthwhile will not, in itself, help to bring about transformation within oneself. One actually needs to apply the technique.

I am saying this because there are quite a few people who are very honest and confide in me that, 'when I listen to what you say, I totally agree with it. It sounds very wonderful. It sounds very good. But I am not really able to do apply it myself'. On one hand one is agreeing but on the other hand one is not really making an attempt to apply it in one's life, in one's practice. If one agrees with it and feels it is worthwhile the next step is to definitely engage in the practice.

Having adopted the practice, whatever initial positive experience one may have from the meditation practice, one must resolve that it is something we need to continue with. If we don't continue with the practice to whatever degree we are able to, then even though we may have developed some sort of positive experience initially we can fall into the trap of being completely complacent and start to think whenever one hears the teachings, 'Oh yes, that sounds true. I agree with that.' But actually we become a little complacent and don't really think of applying it. We think, 'Oh yes, I know about that. I agree with that,' but don't really do anything to apply it in our lives. As Lama Tsong Khapa has reminded us consistently in the Lam Rim teachings, we need to apply our understanding to the practice. For whatever degree we have understood, we try to maintain it, and apply it in practice. That is the advice given.

So now, in order to actually engage in the practice of meditation, we reassess our physical posture. It needs to be upright and relaxed. One also needs to remind oneself of the importance of developing a positive motivation. As the text mentions, the very first thing to do when trying to engage in the practice of meditation is to develop a positive motivation. This means intentionally developing a positive attitude.

The meditation technique involves us making the mental decision and determination to withdraw our mind from all distractions. That means, a 100% withdrawal from all distractions and bringing our attention and focus inward.

While we try to keep our mind in a state where it is not influenced by distractions, to simply remain in a state without focusing on anything is not possible for our mind

right now. Our mind needs something to focus on as an anchoring point. Thus, having withdrawn from all distractions, for the internalised object of our meditation, we focus on our breath. So, for the next few minutes we will just maintain our full attention and focus on the natural inhalation and exhalation of our breath. (*Pause for meditation.*)

Since we don't have much time left for our session, we could use it to address any questions. If anyone has a question, you may raise your hand.

Question: Geshe-la, with the definition of dharma and the example of a clock, I don't quite understand how it applies to the existence of the clock. I would have thought that the clock's real identity is contrary to how we perceive it, i.e. that it ultimately doesn't exist as it appears to us?

Of course, what was being referred to is the conventional or nominal existence of the clock. As ordinary beings we perceive a clock or any other phenomena as being inherently or truly existent. However that doesn't contradict the appearance of a conventional clock. So the definition is on that level.

This shows that you missed yesterday's teaching on this very point. We were discussing in class the other day how the very appearance to us as ordinary beings is what is to be identified as an object of negation and refuted. The explanation as given in more detail yesterday is that according to the highest Buddhist school, the Prasangika or Consequentialist school, the very appearance that we have is at fault.

The clock appears to us as an independent, inherently existent clock. That is how it appears to us and we totally believe that. Because of the fact that we believe it, when someone says, 'Bring the clock', we immediately pick up an object that appears to us as being a truly and inherently existing clock. There is no other way for us to perceive a clock other than to perceive it as being an independently and self-sufficiently existent clock. Of course the reality, which is obscure to us, is that the clock actually exists as an entity made up of many different parts. Due to many different factors it comes into existence and is therefore not independent. The clock depends on many different parts for it to become a clock. However that does not appear to us. Rather an inherently or independently existent clock appears to us and we totally believe in that. Conventionally, the identity of the clock is none other than how we perceive and relate to it. If the object holds the identity of which functions to be a clock, then that is the conventional existence of the clock. Your question is a very good question!

Question: The clock is actually made of something. The parts are made of matter. So what is the matter dependent on to exist?

The investigation goes further, deeper. It is true that the clock, or other solidified objects, depend on matter for their existence. Matter itself is something that is made up of different molecules and atoms. Even when we talk about one atom apparently scientifically it is described as having a nucleus and many protons. Even with scientific investigation, it seems that there are definitely many parts in an atom. When you come down to the subtlest

part of an atom, according the descriptions given in the teachings, it still has directional parts to it. Everything is said to have directional parts to it. Scientists today have come to agree that when searching for the subtlest atom, they reach a point where they cannot split it further. When they try to look further it is void and they can't really find a solid object. Even though this investigation is done through external means, it still comes to the same conclusion that there is nothing that exists independently by itself. So, even scientists seem to have come to that conclusion.

Question: So things exist somewhere in the middle? Things exist but they don't really exist?

Your assumption or conclusion is that things exist somewhere in the middle. There is a danger in that assumption that the middle exists inherently and independently from its own side. According to the highest Buddhist school, called the Prasangika, there is nothing that exists from its own side, independently or inherently. A thing exists merely in dependence on its label and conceptualisation. For example, to us right now if we use a table as an example, the table would appear to us as being something very concrete, solid and existing independently. We feel that there's a table out there that really exists from its own side. However, if we were to actually look for the table, try to search for the table in this object that we point to as being the table, when we disassemble all the different parts and actually search for the table, we end up finding no table there. When you disassemble the parts, you would not find a table.

But if we conclude that there is no table at all, that is what is called nihilism, where you annihilate everything. That is an extreme. According to the highest Buddhist school the manner in which the table exists is merely in dependence on the label that we give to this object and the conceptualisation where we think, 'This is a table.' Besides that labelling and conceptualisation there is no inherently or independently existing table at all.

Going back to the earlier scientific example, seemingly the conclusion scientists come to is that when they try to split even the subtlest atom they reach a point where they cannot find anything. It seems that they agree that, 'Yes, we label it an atom, or the smallest particle. But actually it's not really there. When you search for it, you can't really find it.' It seems that some scientists also come to that conclusion that the mode of existence is merely by labelling and conceptualisation.

Both of your questions were leading to the profound theories in Buddhism. Very, very good questions brought up this subject. The manner of existence of anything in Buddhism is explained as being interdependent. Interdependent origination means that things do not exist independently but rather interdependently. The understanding of interdependent origination is a very, very profound understanding that enhances the understanding of ultimate reality.

Before we conclude for the evening, we will just take a few more minutes again in contemplation. This time we focus on the sound of the mantra being recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra.

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