
The Condensed Lam Rim

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4 November 2009

As usual it would be good to spend some time in meditation. For that purpose we sit in a comfortable, relaxed, upright position. The teachings present the seating posture as either sitting in the seven-point Buddha Vairochana's posture, or whatever position is comfortable for one. The main implication is to find a really comfortable position for the meditation. When one adopts a comfortable physical posture it helps the mind to be more relaxed and focused. If the body is tense it is easy for the mind to be distracted by the tension in the body.

Another purpose of sitting in a relaxed but upright posture is that it allows the channels in the body to be straightened out. When the channels in the body are straight it allows the mind to become fresh because of the unobstructed flow of positive energy. That then allows the mind to be more focused and fresh.

Then, as emphasised regularly, having adopted the appropriate physical posture one needs to set one's mind in a positive frame. This is called developing a positive motivation. Developing a positive motivation basically means giving one's attention to the activity from the very outset. Whatever activity we engage in, it is always preceded by a state of mind that decides to engage in that activity. If we were to pay attention to our state of our mind prior to engaging in an activity there is always the thought, 'I will engage in this activity. I will participate. I will do this.' That state of mind, that pre-determined intention to engage in an activity, is always present. Securing one's positive motivation means that prior to engaging in an activity one makes sure that mind that decides on an activity is a positive one.

If we really pay attention and begin to notice the intention that we have prior to engaging in an activity we will then gain a deeper understanding of what is called in the teachings a positive, negative or even a neutral motivation. Whatever activity we engage in is always preceded by either a positive, negative or neutral intention.

There are certain categories of a positive state of mind. Then there are the negative states of mind that precede an action. Or it could be neutral, without any particular positive or negative state of mind, just doing activities such as walking or sitting. It might not be really influenced by either a negative or positive state of mind. It is just a neutral state of mind. From this we can also get a deeper understanding of how karma is created, what we call positive, negative or neutral karma.

When we are able to identify the three levels of intention that we have prior to engaging in any activity, we will also be able to recognise the reason why we might feel relaxed or agitated. Feeling relaxed or agitated mentally is not dependent on the physical posture. It is not very much dependent on the physical level. We may be relaxing physically, not engaging in any strenuous sort of activity and just sitting down quite relaxed, but if there is a negative state of mind, what we call a negative intention in our mind, we will definitely notice that the mind is not at rest. It is not calm, not at peace. That can be clearly identified.

The more we identify this factor the more we will become convinced that we need to work at familiarising the mind in a positive way. We need to train our mind. As our well-being is very much related to our state of mind, it is crucial, that we train our mind. This becomes very clear to us.

'Training of our mind' means becoming familiar with positive attitudes. When we begin to accept then that we have recognised the importance of meditation. That is basically what meditation means. It's to familiarise the mind with positive attitudes. The more we practise meditation the more we familiarise or acquaint our mind with a positive attitude. That is really what the meditation technique is for.

This process, of analysing our state of our mind and acknowledging that we need to train our mind, is followed by the understanding that it is crucial to develop the state of mind called wisdom or intelligence. Wisdom or intelligence is the ability to analyse what is useful and what is harmful to us. Wisdom or intelligence is crucial for our well-being and it can be developed and strengthened. It becomes clear that one must develop that intelligence.

Further, in this process it also becomes very clear what it is that one needs to adopt and what is it that we need to discard or abandon. That also becomes very clear.

This process leads to another state of mind. We come to understand what it means to practise the Dharma. The very working on our mind, the training of our mind in a positive way, is basically the practice of the Dharma. That becomes very clear to us too.

Coming back to the main point of identifying what meditation is; meditation is a technique which allows one to become acquainted with a positive state of mind, a positive object, and keeps our attention focused on that positive or virtuous object.

The meditation technique is basically to focus on a virtuous object. In our present state we don't really have the capacity to keep our focus on a virtuous object, because our minds are influenced by the delusions. It is said that we are influenced by the thoughts in our mind and that these thoughts, or mind itself, are influenced by the delusions. In that way we don't seem to have much control of our mind right now.

What we need to do is recognise that we need to try to reverse this situation and not allow ourselves to be controlled by our mind, but rather take control of our own mind. We need to try not to allow the mind to be

influenced by the delusions. When we engage in the process of taking control of our mind by recognising the delusions and not allowing the mind to be influenced by them we are beginning to adopt the proper technique.

Going back to the point made earlier, it should be clearer to us that just adopting a relaxed physical posture is not sufficient for us to have real well-being and peace in the mind. What is essential is that while adopting a relaxed and comfortable posture one needs to work at taking control of one's mind. That means directing our attention and focus inward.

Having control of our mind means not allowing the mind to be influenced by the delusions or distractions. This is done by choosing an appropriate, virtuous object to focus upon and keeping our full attention on that object. For the duration that we keep our attention on that virtuous object our mind will not be influenced by, and will be distant and withdrawn from the distractions. As we slowly, slowly engage in this process the more we familiarise ourselves with focusing on the virtuous object the more it becomes natural to be in a virtuous frame of mind. The longer we are in a virtuous frame of mind the longer we will not be affected by the negative influence of the distractions and delusions. This is the process.

For every instant that we engage in meditation, we need an object to focus on. The most appropriate object for us beginners to focus on right now is our own breath. We choose the breath to focus on. The tools or aids for maintaining our focus on the object, as mentioned many times previously, are two mental tools called 'mindfulness' and 'introspection'. These two mental tools serve as an aid to oppose the two main obstacles to keeping our mind focused on the object. The two main faults, or obstacles, are laxity and excitement. Of course the general distractions are also an obstacle but here in the meditation technique the two main faults are laxity and excitement.

What we are attempting to do in choosing an object to focus on is to develop concentration. Once we have developed concentration we can use that in many positive ways. Concentration, as defined in the teachings, is a state of mind that has a stability of focus on its object with clarity. Stability, or intensity, and clarity of the focus on the object are defined as concentration. The obstacle that hinders the stability or intensity of focus on the object is called excitement. That which hinders the clarity of the object is laxity. That is how the two obstacles are to be understood.

The two main tools for maintaining focus and developing concentration are mindfulness and introspection. The mind that allows one to initially focus on the object is mindfulness. The moment we remember someone or something, our focus or attention will naturally go to that object by the fact of remembering it. The meditation technique is basically the same. One is acquainting oneself with the object by constantly bringing to mind the object that one has chosen to focus on. By constantly bringing it to mind and familiarising oneself with that object, one develops mindfulness. Mindfulness serves as an aid but in turn it also helps us to focus better on the object. This is how mindfulness works.

What is translated from Tibetan as mindfulness could also be translated as recollection or remembering. After repeatedly bringing the object to mind one reaches a state of being able to maintain focus on the object.

Having gained a focus on the chosen object one may lapse from that attention or focus and start to wander off. The mental tool that investigates whether one is maintaining one's focus on the object, whether one is being mindful of the object or not, is called introspection. The two work together to maintain a continuous focus on the object.

As mentioned in the teachings, it is much easier for someone who has good recollection or mindfulness to develop concentration. In this process we can begin to understand the truth of that statement.

We mentioned earlier that the purpose of meditation, of focusing on a particular object in contemplative meditation, is to develop concentration. The two main tools for developing concentration and the two main obstacles that hinder developing concentration were also explained. At this point we may ask, 'What is concentration?' In the teachings there is a distinction between primary minds and secondary minds or mental factors. The question then is, 'What is concentration? Is it a primary mind or a secondary mind? Or is mindfulness itself concentration?'

The teachings explain that concentration is neither a primary mind nor the mental factor called mindfulness. Rather concentration is a specific mental factor which, by its own power, is able to maintain single-pointed focus on an object. That is how concentration is defined. When someone develops concentration the mind is, of course, simultaneously focused on the object as well. The primary mind or consciousness is also focused on the object but it is not concentration because, according to the definition, the mind is not focusing on the object by its own power but rather with the aid of concentration, which is a secondary mind.

Mindfulness is not concentration. It's another state of mind that has its own particular function. Concentration is a specific mental factor that fits this definition. It is good for us to clearly identify the concentration that we are attempting to develop.

It is good to be quite specific in one's understanding. With this definition of concentration one then understands that there is a distinction between single-pointed focus and a single-pointed concentration. When a person develops single-pointed concentration the primary mind is also able to focus on the object single-pointedly but it is not a single-pointed concentration. Whereas the mental factor of concentration is both a single-pointed focus as well as a single-pointed concentration.

The object that we choose to focus on in our meditation here is the breath. The breath is the most appropriate object to begin with. There are particular instructions about the breath. It should be even, natural breathing. While we focus on the breath we must be careful that our breath is regulated in the proper way. There are three main things that the breath should be free from. First, it

should be free from sound. When we breathe in and breathe out through our nostrils we should make sure that we breathe gently without sound. Second, it should be free from being laboured. Checking that one does not have a heavy, laboured breath. Third, the in breath and the out breath should be of equal length. We shouldn't take a deep inhalation and breath out quickly or the other way around. The breath itself is to be regulated in this way.

When one has adopted the correct breathing rhythm in an appropriate way, then we place our full attention and focus upon the breath. To place our full attention and focus upon our breath we must withdraw our mind from all distractions. Temporarily, we try not to be concerned with anything else. We just leave everything else aside, all other general thoughts. We try not to allow the mind to be influenced in any way by other thoughts. That is done when we develop the strong determination that, 'I am going to keep my attention and focus on the breath, nothing but the breath itself.' This means we are 100% focused on the breath.

Being 100% focused on the breath means that we try to be free from a half-focused, half-distracted state of mind that is seemingly focused on our breath but also has one part of our mind pre-occupied with other thoughts or distractions. If we allow that to happen we are missing the point. We get habituated in a faulty meditation. In order to develop the proper technique we must keep our full attention 100% focused on the breath itself. Thus, for the next few minutes, we will adopt this technique. (*Pause for meditation.*)

That should be sufficient for now. We have time to go through a few lines from the text.

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 our last session we explained the prerequisites for developing the state of mind called renunciation, which is a state of mind striving to obtain liberation. When one has developed that very strong intention or wish to achieve liberation, the text then addressed the question, 'What basis does one need in order to achieve liberation?' As the text explained, the supreme basis is a human rebirth intact with the eight freedoms or liberties and the ten endowments. Within a human rebirth with all those conditions intact, there are two categories of humans. The text refers to 'lay' and 'ordained or renunciate' humans. Within these two categories, an ordained person has better conditions to strive to achieve liberation as they have better conditions to do practise.

The text quotes from Maitreya's text called *Ornament of Mahayana Sutras* where it says, 'The class of renunciates has limitless virtues. Therefore the bodhisattva who observes vows is superior to the one who is a householder'. What is being explained here is that even among the noble beings, bodhisattvas, those who have the renunciate (monks and nuns) vows, are superior

because of the self-liberation vows that they have taken. Because of that, they are superior to bodhisattvas who are lay bodhisattvas.

The reasons why a renunciate or ordained life has better conditions to practise in order to strive to achieve liberation was explained in quite a lot of detail in our last session on this topic. However, as explained earlier, the main criteria as an ordained person is that the mind should be free from the distractions. The physical body should be free from frivolous activities and the mind free from distractions. Within that one has to have the virtue of contentment. As an ordained person, one needs to have less desire and more contentment.

As explained earlier in the teachings, a monk's or nun's state of mind should be free from desire and have contentment to the level that if they were brought to a king's vault filled with jewels and so forth and given a choice to have them, the renunciate would see this as a source of all misery and suffering rather than a source of real pleasure and happiness. When a renunciate has reached the point of being able to regard even the most precious worldly objects in that way, their mind is in a suitable state to practise the Dharma. This is what has been taught by Lama Tsongkapa.

Even lay people do sometimes confide, 'Oh, money is really the source of all evil. In the family, that's really one of the main reasons to squabble and argue. It really is about money.' Even in a lay life it seems that having some wealth is not really the answer to happiness and goodness but actually can be a cause for a lot of misery, a lot of suffering. Now, of course, I am not sure if those who confide in me in that way really mean that or are just saying it. I am not sure. [*Geshe-la laughs*]

In fact there are many people from normal walks of life that come to the point of understanding that having less money seems to contribute to a more easy, more jovial life and having a lot of money seems to cause more worries.

Lama Tsongkapa, having quoted from Maitreya's text, mentions that this being the case, the life of a renunciate is praised as the best vehicle for achieving freedom that is liberation from cyclic existence. In addition, it is thought that it is the best life for accomplishment of omniscience by way of perfection of the tantric vehicles. He then says that among the three sets of vows, it is the vows of a renunciate that are the vows of individual liberation. What is being indicated is that what we call the renunciate vows are objects of great respect.

This was also stated by the Buddha Shakyamuni. Before he passed away he indicated to his followers that, 'When I pass away from this world, you can regard the vows that I have given as my successor.' Thus Buddha Shakyamuni did not appoint an individual person to be his successor, even though there are individuals who are known as the seven successors of Buddha Shakyamuni. However he didn't seem to personally appoint them. Rather, Buddha Shakyamuni appointed the self-liberation vows as his successor. He said, referring to the vows, 'When I have passed away from this world, this will be your protection. This will be your guide'. This is how their value had been established. Addressing particularly

the sangha, the monks and nuns, he said, 'Those who have taken ordination, you must keep this as your main object of protection. And you must uphold the vows at all times'.

Earlier in the text it said, that this set of vows is the utmost technique to practise what we call the 'tantra' or 'mantra' vehicles to accomplish omniscience and become enlightened.

There are three sets of vows. These are: the vows of self-liberation, the bodhisattva vows, and the tantra vows. What is being indicated here is that it is the vows of self-liberation, the renunciate vows, are the main method through which one obtains liberation and omniscience. It is not the bodhisattva vows or tantric vows but rather the self-liberation vows that one must observe in order to gain the higher realisations. One must really pay attention to what is being indicated here and take it to heart. The text further says, 'Therefore you should respect the vows of individual liberation, the root of the teaching'. They are the very source or root of the teachings.

There are seven particular categories of self-liberation vows. There are the fully ordained monk and nun vows. That's two. Then there are the novice monk's and nun's vows. That makes four. Then there are the layperson's vows for males and females. That makes six. Then there are the one-day vows to make seven. The first four are said to be ordained vows and the last three are the layperson's vows. There are the self-liberation vows applied to the ordained with more vows and lay person's vows.

What one needs to really understand in relation to the vows is that the vows that one takes are a pledge that one makes to abide with ethical values. When one makes the decision to live ethically then, in order to reinforce one's decision to live an ethical life, one takes the vows. When one takes those vows, and lives a moral life that becomes the basis for one's practice.

When one understands that the very basis of the Buddha's teachings is ethics and morality one can also understand it when the Buddha's teachings are claimed to be based on non-violence. Observing ethics is the very basis, the very foundation of the Buddha's teachings. When one relates to that one can see the truth of the statement that the Buddha's teachings are based on non-violence. Anyone who observes any level of the vows and lives a moral and ethical life, will, at the very least, intentionally refrain from harming others. That is basically what taking the vows or living ethically means. It's refraining from harming others. Thus we can understand that one is practising non-violence by practising the vows.

To back up this understanding we can quote from the Buddha's own words. He said, 'for anyone who causes harm to others, I will not regard such a person as being virtuous. It is not a virtuous act. Harming others is not a virtuous act'. This is what the Buddha clearly said.

Thus, in relation to the teachings given here, it is good to gain the understanding that if one were to question what it means to be a Buddhist it basically comes down to

these two main factors. If one develops a keen respect and sees the Buddha as a guide and teacher, as a source of one's inspiration and advice and then lives one's life based on ethics and morality that is what we would call practicing as a Buddhist. It really comes down that.

Before we end the session for the evening, we can spend a few moments again in contemplation. This time we focus on the sound of the mantra being recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. We just try to keep our attention focused there.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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