
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As usual we can do some meditation. For that purpose, we sit in a comfortable, relaxed posture. As we engage in the practice of meditation, we may consider the purpose of this practice: what results do we wish to achieve from it? This is a worthwhile point to consider.

To summarise, one of the main purposes of practising meditation is to subdue the mind. Not being able to subdue one's mind is the reason it appears uncontrollable and unsettled – without any particular reason, we can feel distressed and agitated. This disturbed state is due to our lack of control over the mind; in other words for as long we have not mastered our own mind, it will be influenced by the delusions and as a result we become disturbed.

For as long as the mind remains in a disturbed, agitated state, we will definitely not experience a real sense of joy and happiness. And when one lacks an inner sense of joy and happiness, it seems to contribute to disturbances in one's surrounding environment.

When the mind is disturbed, this has negative consequences on our relationships with the people and things around us, especially those we normally consider to be close associates. It may appear to us that someone we are close to is not favouring us, or is not to our liking. That is a clear sign that our mind is disturbed. When we begin to see the connection between our state of mind and how we perceive our surroundings, we will be able to direct the mind in a positive direction, and prevent it from taking a negative course.

It seems that we all share this natural tendency for the mind to be agitated. Of course, there are some exceptions, such as the great masters and meditators but, in general, mental agitation is something we share with most people on this planet. Because we all have this in common, we can say that in this case we are all equal. If we think about this, it seems absurd that positive attributes are not divided equally among all people, while the negative attributes – those that disturb our mind – are equally divided!

Thus when we look into any normal relationship, whether within a family or any other type of relationship, it seems there will always be some sort of agitation, something not quite right. In searching for the cause of any miscommunication, or whatever form of disturbance there may be in the relationship, if we start paying attention to our own mind, we will come to recognise clearly that the disturbance stems from our mental attitude. We may ask, why does it depend on my state of mind? If we look into the state of our mind, we will find

that, because the mind is not in a state of peace, tranquillity or calmness but is instead unsettled, all the disturbances arise.

When we recognise the connection of having an unsettled mind leads to negativities, disturbances and so forth, we can affirm to ourselves that we must definitely, at every cost, make an attempt to settle the mind. Furthermore, whatever level of stability we may have already achieved, to make that even more stable and firm.

Why is the mind unsettled? As mentioned earlier, it is the case where we don't have control over the mind, but rather we are under the control of the mind. And the mind in turn is controlled by the delusions, which is why it is unsettled. Thus we need to make an attempt to control the mind, which can be done by maintaining an inner our focus and stabilising it. That settled mind will naturally prevent one from being influenced by the distractions or delusions. In that way, the mind gains more tranquillity and peace.

We can readily experience the positive effect of meditation practice when we make an attempt to apply the appropriate technique. After choosing the appropriate meditation object, we focus on it, immediately allowing the mind to be distanced from the distractions and delusions. Because the mind is withdrawn from the distractions, thus not influenced by the delusions, it naturally settles into a state of tranquillity, of calmness. When we make an attempt to apply the appropriate technique, we will feel the immediate positive effects of that practice.

If you make a regular attempt to engage in meditation practice using the proper technique, you will notice a transformation taking place as your mind becomes more settled. As you engage further in meditation practice, you will begin to experience what is referred to as a 'boon of bliss'; which is a mental state accompanied by a sense of calmness and bliss. When that state dawns in the mind, that is the point when one will have really experienced the positive effects of meditation. For such a person, there is no need to provide further reasoning, as their own experience validates the positive effects of meditation.

However, even when we have reached the stage of experiencing a sense of inner bliss, if we just feel satisfied with that and do not maintain a continuous practice but allow it to lapse, that sense of bliss would start fading. We will not experience that natural positive effect if we do not make an effort to continue the practice. Even when we have gained a sufficient degree of positive experience, we must continue to practise.

Thus when we think about the positive effects of meditation, it should inspire us to actually engage in the practice, to take it to heart. This is how we should go about it.

We gain the real benefit of meditation when we are able to identify the source of our immediate disturbances. It may be in the form of a particular distraction – a situation, a person, or some other thing. Whatever causes our mental disturbance needs to be identified and dealt with in meditation. If we adopt a formal practice of meditation and focus on a particular object while not

acknowledging the real source of our problem and not dealing with it, although our mind may gain a certain level of tranquillity and calmness, as soon as we come out of the meditation, we would immediately fall victim to whatever is disturbing us in our normal life. Thinking one is gaining some benefit from the practice of meditation and transforming one's life for the better is then a laughable matter, because as long as we ignore the real source of our problems and do not deal with it, transformation will not occur naturally.

Thus we must identify whatever is causing our distress; we need to really understand it, to identify what is the causing problem and to use that as the main object of our meditation practice. Then, because we have familiarised ourselves in dealing with that particular problem during the meditation, when we come out of the meditation, due to that familiarity, even when we come face to face with the particular situation or object that is causing us distress, we will be able to handle it better. It will not disturb us as much.

We can take the example of a mental state such as strong attachment to a certain object. When we meet or think about that object, it may cause strong attachment to arise in our mind. In contrast, when we reflect on a certain situation or object or person, we may feel intense anger in our mind. In either case, whether our distress is caused by strong attachment or intense anger, we must be able to identify the problem and deal with it in our meditation practice.

For example, if we are affected by strong attachment to a particular object in our everyday life and we don't address that problem in our meditation practice, our mind will be influenced by that attachment, becoming disturbed and distressed whenever we come into contact with or think about that object. If we ignore this and attempt to do other practices such as focusing on the breath, because we have just set the real source of the problem aside, we will find that when we come out of the meditation practice, the same strong emotion will dominate again, and we will again be overtaken by strong attachment; it is the same with anger.

Thus if we were to question whether our meditation practice has been effective, it is not the case that meditation practice is not effective because it cannot deal with a situation like that; rather we have not made a real attempt to deal with the cause of our distress. We have put that aside and tried to focus on another meditation practice.

This is a very important and crucial point we must address in order to overcome the main sources of our problem. I am sharing this advice with you as something that you must really pay attention to, because if you can begin to understand this point, that is when real transformation can take place; your practice will be effective in dealing with the real issues and problems in your life.

So if we want to overcome the real causes of our problems, we must address them, using whatever situation is causing us distress as the main object of our meditation. For example, someone may be affected by strong attachment to an object, such as another person,

and may ignore their infatuation with that object, thinking that it is not really a problem, that it is fine. They may then attempt to do another form of meditation practice. But while they are engaged in that practice, as soon as the object of attachment comes to mind, there may be a thought that the object of their attachment is ignoring them, or not paying attention to them, or being distant from them. That brings distress to the mind, causing them to feel unsettled – even to the point where some people have confided that they can't eat properly when they are infatuated with an object; or they can't sleep properly; or their body starts to shake uncontrollably. These are some of the extreme physical symptoms of someone who is infatuated with an object through attachment.

So if one ignores dealing with the problem effectively and does not use it as an object for meditation, as mentioned previously, as soon as one comes out of another type of meditation or even during that meditation, one will again fall into the same situation of being completely dominated by attachment and will thus feel distressed, disturbed and unsettled. As days, weeks, months and years go by, we won't find a transformation taking place in the mind. We will be constantly affected by the situation of the object – being attached to it, feeling anger, feeling a little happy and joyful at times but then feeling distressed again. Our mind will be constantly fluctuating.

As mentioned previously, if we start blaming the practice of meditation, that is missing the point. We have not made a real attempt to deal with the situation in our meditation practice, so saying that meditation is not effective would be unfair, to say the least.

Even with the meditation where we focus on our breath and just keep the mind tranquil, we can utilise this practice to our benefit by first being mindful and acknowledging the real issues affecting us, and whether they are based on attachment or anger. By acknowledging this, we are making a mental note to ourselves that: "I am practising meditation now in order to deal with that situation and working towards overcoming that difficulty in my life" – whatever the problem or situation may be.

So we make a mental note and keep that as the ultimate goal that one is working towards. With that in mind, we can engage in a short meditation by just focusing on the breath. Because we have identified and acknowledged the real problem facing us, even this short meditation serves the purpose of dealing with that bigger problem in our life.

In relation to attachment, even doctors and psychologists claim that if one is not careful and allows oneself to be infatuated by attachment, it could lead to real psychological disturbances; even insanity. When attachment is not dealt with appropriately, it could bring on a mental illness and lead to someone becoming completely insane. So it is not only from a Buddhist or spiritual point of view that I say this; even the medical world supports this view.

I have made these preliminary points to remind us of the importance of taking meditation practice to heart and doing it effectively. Now we can engage in the practice of

meditation, choosing our breath as the particular object on which to focus. First, we check again that we are sitting in a comfortable physical posture. Then we mentally make the commitment to ourselves that: 'For the next few minutes, I will not allow my mind to be distracted by the delusions, by any form of internal or external distraction, but rather I will completely withdraw it and bring my full attention and focus inward'. Having brought the mind's focus inward, one then places one's attention and focus on the breath, and tries to maintain that focus for the next few minutes. Keeping all the earlier points in mind, we now adopt this technique. *(Pause for meditation)*

Since it is quite a warm evening, rather than going into the text, we might address a few questions if you have any.

To recap the main points we addressed this evening: first, we need to have a control over our mind, to be master of our mind. When we say being "master" over one's own mind, we mean not allowing it to be influenced by the distractions, particularly the intense delusions mentioned earlier, such as strong attachment or intense anger. By not allowing one's mind to be completely dominated by the delusions but rather mastering it, one will be able to attain inner tranquillity, calm and peace. That is crucial and most important in one's life.

Another point is that if we allow ourselves to be controlled by a mind that, in turn, is controlled by the delusions such as strong attachment or anger, this will affect us negatively, so we must reverse that situation.

If we could just keep those main points in mind, then we would have gained something from this evening. If there are no questions, I would like to conclude because of the warm evening. I don't see any hands so everyone agrees!

Whenever we have gained some understanding, it is good to keep the main points in mind. I have made an attempt to share some important advice relating to the practice of meditation, and this advice will come in handy when you attempt to engage in the real practice. So try not to forget it and bring it to mind in one's practice.

For example, in the morning, when you find some time to do meditation and attempt some practice, if you ask "what am I supposed to be doing?" you should recollect immediately any disturbance, delusion or situation you may be experiencing at that time. Bring that to mind and think that in order to be able to effectively with the cause of the problem – the delusions – you will engage in the practice. That is why one needs to do the practice, so one would see the relevance of doing the practice.

Before we conclude for the evening, we will spend a few minutes again in contemplation. This time, as we withdraw our focus and attention from the external factors or distractions, bring our mind inward and keep our attention focused inward, we focus it on the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha's Shakyamuni's mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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