
The Condensed Lam Rim

ལྷན་སྐྱེས་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ་བཞུགས་སྒྲིག་།

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As usual it would be good to spend some time in meditation. As we are a gathering of meditators, it is most appropriate that we spend some time in meditation.

For most of us, before engaging in the practice of meditation we need to remind ourselves that it is important to develop the proper motivation for meditation practice. This is true for any positive activity that we engage in. Any activity that we engage in must be preceded by a positive motivation. It is very useful to know that the types of motivation preceding an action determine how those actions turn out. It is good to check what kind of state of mind one is prior to engaging in an activity

When we take the time to investigate how our motivation or intentions work we will come to notice and understand that the motivation or intention is definitely a factor that influences whatever actions that we undertake. When we are in a negative state of mind with negative or ulterior motives, not very pure motives and intentions, one finds the physical or verbal actions that follow, whatever action one takes will also be tainted. They would not be very conducive, appealing, proper actions.

Whereas when the motive or intention is pure and altruistic then the actions that follow would also be positive. To actually recognise that is essential in our life. We can investigate and check out whether this is true by investigating our state of mind and checking our motives.

If we notice prior to engaging in an action that we are in a negative state of mind and have ulterior motives or negative intentions we would be able to remind ourselves that the natural consequences of a negative intention would be negative actions. Thus one would be able to protect oneself by first catching the intentions and preventing oneself from carrying out those actions. In that way we will be able to protect ourselves from adverse situations.

The masters and the teachings advise us to generate a positive motivation prior to undertaking any action. That is really very sound and profound advice. First of all we need to understand why we need to take the time to generate a positive motivation or intention. The reason we need to this is because we are seldom in a naturally, positive state of mind. We might find that our mind could be influenced by any of the delusions; the negative states of mind such as anger, jealousy or attachment. If one were not to pay attention to one's intentions, then if we were to engage in meditation practice, which is meant to be a spiritual practice, when tainted with a negative state

of mind or negative motives, then the practice itself would be sullied. It would not be very pure.

There are occasions where we might, even though we have a wish to meditate and acknowledge the benefits of meditation in general, be doing the meditation practice out of a sense of competition with others. Or it could be a sense of jealousy that others are doing it so it must be something that we should do as well. Or it could be out of pride.

When our motives are influenced by these negative states of mind then the meditation practice itself will be tainted and not pure. Thus the teachings remind us that we have to intentionally generate a positive motivation to secure our state of mind in a pure state, a pure form, prior to engaging in the actual practice. When we begin to familiarise ourselves with checking our motives then that, in turn, will definitely benefit us in our daily lives as well.

In relation to generating a positive motivation before a meditation practice, if one is already in a positive state of mind then one need not make an extra effort to generate a positive state of mind. If one's mind is already influenced by altruistic motives, love and compassion with a sense of wishing to help others, then just maintaining that positive motive one can engage in the practice.

It is in this way that it becomes really helpful to actually check our state of mind and become familiar with it. To constantly be mindful increases our analytical intelligence, which is the wisdom to detect whether we are engaging in negative or positive actions. Checking one's motive can help to enhance intelligence or wisdom within oneself.

There is definitely a practical benefit of checking one's motives in our daily lives. When we periodically check the state of our mind, then due to that familiarity we will be able to detect when our mind is not in a very harmonious or calm state. We will see, for example, when it is dominated by the state of anger. When we detect anger in our mind we will be able to remind ourselves that if we follow the mind of anger, if we allow ourselves to be influenced by anger, it will be disastrous for us. It can lead to actions that will be harmful to us and to others. By remembering the great and varied disadvantages of anger, as soon as we detect anger in our mind we will be able to be cautious and protect ourselves from engaging in actions that are influenced by anger. In this way we can slowly overcome anger. By the very act of acknowledging it and recognising it as a destructive state of mind we would immediately start to feel calm. Having noticed that we would start becoming calmer and anger will not be able to control and dominate us. In this way we get a real practical benefit in our lives by the mere practice of just checking our motives. It is not a practice to be taken lightly. When the teachings mention generating positive motivation it is actually a profound practice that can help and benefit us in our lives.

When we understand the practical benefits of a positive intention, we will begin to see how the practice that follows from that motivation, such as the meditation practice itself, is something really worthwhile. If the meditation practice is preceded by a positive motive, which in itself is a very powerful way to set our mind in

the right direction, then the following practices can naturally be seen as something beneficial for oneself. This is how we can understand the practical benefit of meditation practice by relating it to the importance of generating a positive motivation.

When we check our motives and are able to detect a negative state of mind such as anger, it will help us to protect ourselves from following the anger through. What does it mean when we follow the anger through or when we allow ourselves to be influenced by anger? When our mind is in a state of anger whatever actions we undertake, verbal or physical, will be influenced by that destructive energy. What we say will be hurtful to others. Our speech to others will be inappropriate with unpleasant remarks. Our physical actions will also be unpleasant and destructive.

When we think about these natural consequences we can ask the question, 'Who do we direct those unpleasant remarks towards? Who do we direct our unpleasant physical gestures towards?' It is none other than those who are close to us, those who we live with or associate with regularly, those that we consider companions or friends. It is those very companions, friends or relatives that we associate with that we direct our anger and unpleasant gestures towards. Our words or physical gestures are directed towards those very people that we consider our loved ones. So we can see how destructive anger is in directing unfair gestures towards those that we love.

We can give many examples of the ill-effects of anger. For example, if a family is enjoying themselves and having a meal together just one person becoming upset could disturb the atmosphere within that gathering. If one person in that gathering becomes upset and angry then the remarks they make or the gestures that they express would immediately cause unrest amongst everyone else there. Just one person's state of mind of anger can disrupt and disturb many others. This is a very practical and simple way of illustrating the ill-effects of anger. We can use these practical examples to remind ourselves that anger is something that is harmful, that is not useful in any way, and causes disharmony amongst relatives and friends and so forth. It's another reason that we need to pay attention to the state of our mind.

By bringing to mind the ill-effects of anger and all the rest of the negative states of mind and recognising them as harmful one can then remind oneself that the reason to engage in the practice of meditation is to subdue our minds and to be able to control the influence of these negative states of mind. The very technique of meditation involves withdrawing our mind from all negative influences or negative states of mind. We completely withdraw our mind from all negative thoughts and draw our mind inward and focus on a chosen object.

The practice of checking one's motives is very useful, not only in the practice of meditation but also in practical ways in our life. When we reflect upon our motives and securing our motives to be pure and untainted by negative influences we can see how our motives can be influenced by altruistic motives such as the wish to benefit others. When one's motives are influenced by

these sorts of intentions whatever one does will be useful for others.

We can generate positive motivation at all times, at any event or anything we are involved in, even in our study or work environment. It's also appropriate that we check our motives and remind ourselves, 'May whatever activity I am engaging in here be of benefit to others. May it serve as a means to benefit and help others.' With that motive even the normal work that we do in our life will become meaningful and useful. This is a practical way to see the benefit of a positive motivation.

This is also a response to some who make the comment, 'How could spiritual practice, or checking one's practice for that matter, actual benefit us in our normal life? How can it help us in our normal daily life?' So, with the earlier explained reasons, one can understand that it definitely benefit us in our everyday activities.

In this way we can see that the practical benefit of the positive motivation is that whatever we do would be appealing and pleasing for others. By that mere fact it actually benefits others. Spiritual practice is a means to benefit and help others. Even if we only extend our help and benefit to just one or two people that is a sufficient and worthwhile thing to do. To that extent, whatever we have done has been worthwhile and meaningful.

By pleasing others such as those that we associate with, our partner or friends, we'll have their appreciation and a good response, which in return makes us feel joyful and happy. In this way we can see there is the mutual benefit. We need to consider the fact that we can not just live alone, isolated by ourselves. We need to depend on companionship and friendship. We depend on many others in our life. This is something we need to reflect upon.

Having explained the importance of developing a positive motivation we can develop such a positive motivation in our mind and adopt a relaxed and upright posture for meditation. When we consider why we need practice of meditation, we can consider the fact that we all instinctively have the wish to be happy and do not like any disturbance in our mind. We want to be happy and joyful. That is reason enough to commit ourselves to the practice of meditation. In its very technique, the practice of meditation involves withdrawing our mind from the distractions. As we withdraw our mind from the distractions, or negative states of mind, and focus on an inner object that we choose, our mind naturally becomes settled. As we experience that settled mind, we naturally experience calmness, tranquillity and joy within ourselves. That is the practical benefit. Meditation is a technique for acquiring the appropriate conditions for us to feel settled and joy and happy within oneself. It is also a technique to help us avoid engaging in adverse situations or conditions that disturb our mind. This is how we can basically summarise the technique of meditation.

In adopting that focus on an inner object we apply the particular states of mind that are called mindfulness and introspection. Mindfulness allows us to recall the object that we have chosen to focus on and constantly bring our attention to that object. Introspection is the state of mind

that is constantly diligent checking whether our mind is getting distracted or not. When we notice that the mind is distracted we bring it back again to the focus. When we adopt the appropriate conditions for the practice of meditation and avoid the adverse conditions that hinder our practice, we will be able to engage in the proper technique of meditation that will bring about a real benefit.

It is essential that we familiarise ourselves with the proper technique, which is that having chosen the object, we try to be constantly mindful and aware of object. At the same time we are diligent in ensuring that the mind is not becoming distracted and if it becomes distracted that we bring our focus back. If we apply this technique during the meditation session then, due to that familiarity, we will be able to derive the benefit of that in our everyday lives outside the meditation session. We'll be able to develop a natural awareness, a natural diligence, in our mind that can be very useful in our everyday life. This is how the practice of meditation can help and benefit our regular lives outside the meditation session. It is important to understand that.

One of the most essential points being made is recognising the particular disturbances that may occur in one's life. We might feel distressed or angst as soon as we recall certain objects. Whatever object it may be, as soon as we recall it our mind becomes disturbed. We need to pay particular attention to withdrawing our attention from that object and bringing our focus completely onto the object that we choose. If we don't make that particular attempt to withdraw our mind from the object that disturbs us then, as soon as we recall that object, it can immediately disturb a seemingly calm state. Thus we intentionally bring to mind the object that disturbs us and mentally make the commitment, 'I will not allow my mind to be influenced by the disturbance of that object. I will keep my attention and focus on the object that I choose here for meditation.' Identifying what actually disturbs us is really essential. In that way it will protect us in our normal everyday life.

As I have mentioned a few times previously, I do have some experience with this. (*chuckles from students*) An experience from the very earliest parts of my life when I was studying in the monasteries in Tibet is something that vividly occurs as a really very good example. When I studied in the monastery as a youngster I was far away from my hometown and there would be times when my mum would come and visit me. When I was first sent to the monastery and put into the care of my teachers I would forget about home after a while and just be completely preoccupied with my studies. However, when my mum came to visit me it would be a nice and joyful occasion. But, when she left I would be very distressed and I would not be able to focus on my studies. The mind would somehow be very sad and missing my mum. That occurred only after my mum came to visit me. Otherwise it really didn't disturb me much. When my teacher noticed that I was feeling distressed and understanding the reason why I was in that state he would distract me from that particular distress and ask me to just go out and play with other young monks. Having played with other young monks for some time I would forget about my

mum's visit. (*Geshe-la chuckles*) Then my teacher would slowly bring me back to study again because, of course, I had to continue to focus on the study.

Having explained the motivation that we need to have and the technique itself in a concise way, we can now actually adopt the meditation technique for the next few minutes. Reassessing our physical posture and our state of mind we make the mental decision and commitment to withdraw our mind from all other preoccupations, all other thoughts and distractions. The inner object that we place our focus upon is our own breath. We imagine a vivid image of the breath as we naturally breathe in and breathe out. We just bring our full attention to our own breath and keep our attention 100% focused on that. We will try to maintain that focus on our breath for the next few minutes. (*pause for meditation*)

That should be sufficient for now. If anyone has any questions, you can raise your hands. I would like to invite any questions.

Question: I was told by someone that it is useless to feel compassion towards a deceased person; what practices can one do for them?

There are, of course, practices one can do for someone who has died. It would not be the case that love and compassion would not help them. In fact with a sense of love and compassion towards them one can do practices, particularly dedications of one's practices, towards the good conditions for their next life; 'may they have the best conditions of wealth and physical conditions as well, for them to be able to continue in a spiritual practice and progress spiritually'. In this way we can make dedications and prayers on their behalf.

The extent to which this helps them is, of course, something that it is hard for us to detect and really say. But there definitely seems to be some positive effect for them due to the good connection that we have with them. When we say prayers for someone we have a good connection with, it seems to have a positive effect.

When one generates positive thoughts on behalf of them and does practices dedicated towards their benefit there is no doubt that oneself is also the beneficiary. It definitely helps us. It brings about a good feeling within us too.

When we do these practices it benefits us and when we have a good connection with the other it definitely seems to bring a positive effect for them as well; it will definitely help them, wherever they may be reborn. As a Buddhist we believe in past and future lives. On that basis whether someone is here presently in their actual form, or even if they are in a different form, as long as they are a sentient being and have not become enlightened they are definitely an object of our love and compassion. There is definitely purpose, meaning and benefit in extending our love and compassion and good thoughts.

Those who do not believe in past or future lives might, of course, feel that there is no continuum of the person, so there is no point in feeling love and compassion. In relation to a deceased person, be they your friend or relative, the main point that I was discussing earlier was the connection that one has with them. In light of the

Buddhist teachings of a previous life and future lives we can definitely rely upon the fact that they are reborn somewhere. If they haven't become enlightened as a Buddha they are reborn somewhere. From what we can perceive this is either a human or an animal existence. That is something that we can relate to on this planet. Whether they are reborn as a human, or in the likelihood that they may be reborn in one of the animal states, they are an object of our love and compassion.

If they are not enlightened they would sometimes go through difficulties or hardships, the same difficulties and sufferings that we go through. When developing love and compassion towards others it is said that it is important that we relate to the sufferings that we experience, particularly when we gain the teachings of cyclic existence and what is involved in being in cyclic existence. Contemplating the sufferings and miseries of any living being in cyclic existence in general actually instills a great sense of love and compassion for others and the wish to do whatever one can to benefit them becomes quite strong in one's mind. Thinking about the predicament of living beings who are suffering in samsara becomes a way for us to be able to relate to them. According to Buddha's teachings we have a connection with all living beings. So all sentient beings are an object of our love and compassion. A way to generate that mind is by thinking about the sufferings that beings are experiencing.

We can give a summary of the sufferings of cyclic existence. Humans or animals experience the suffering of birth, having to be born again. Then they have to experience sickness during their life. Then they have to experience the suffering of aging. Then, eventually, there is the suffering of death. These four types of sufferings effect any living being in cyclic existence. No one is immune to these sufferings. Thus it is safe to think that if they are reborn as a sentient being in any existence they would have to go through those experiences again: being born, getting ill, aging, then death. Contemplating this fact in others lives is something that can develop a strong sense of compassion within oneself.

As explained specifically in the Buddha's teachings, when any individual passes on from this life their consciousness travels on into the intermediate state and, to take the particular example of someone being reborn as a human being, enters the next life's mother's womb. From the moment the consciousness enters the mother's womb the sufferings of birth start to take place. During the time of confinement in the mother's womb the foetus is said to experience a lot of suffering. When it's born there is obviously suffering and then again after it is born. In this way one goes through childhood, adulthood and the aging process and then dies and has to be reborn again. This unceasing round of cycling from one existence to the next really becomes a great source of misery and suffering for any individual being.

In order to bring other's sufferings vividly to one's mind, one must first contemplate one's own predicament and how it affects oneself. When we really reflect upon these teachings and that, for as long as the conditions are there, we have to be unceasingly reborn again and again we

will find the statement, 'I don't fear death itself, what I fear is rebirth.' to be very true.

Thank you for that question, and thanks to the rest of you who listened very attentively. I really appreciate it and thank everyone for coming. I'll conclude here for the evening. Before concluding we will again spend a few moments in contemplation. This time we will focus on the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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