
The Condensed Lam Rim

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As we explain regularly, meditation practice is done so that we can achieve a clear state of mind. Meditation helps us to transform an unclear state of mind into a clear state of mind. It transforms a hectic, unstable state of mind into a more stable mind; and helps to subdue an unsubdued mind. If we apply meditation techniques in our life, then it is definitely possible to transform and subdue the mind. First of all, the distracted mind is transformed into a focused mind, which in turn becomes stable and clear state of mind; we can definitely achieve this. However it is good for us to try to look into what are the causes needed to achieve a focused, clear state of mind. Check for yourself whether what I am about to relate is true for yourself or not. First of all, let us consider our being - we have what is called a physical body, we have speech, and we have a state of mind. When we look into what we do and what we say, we find that both our physical and verbal activities are influenced by the mind, that is, our attitude or intentions.

The initial intentions of the mind influence our verbal and physical activities. So, the mind influences our body and speech, which then sets us off on acquiring material things in life. Some of the material things we acquire may be useful to us, and other things not so beneficial. The way in which we acquire material things requires intention or thought, which we then act on. From this understanding - that mental thoughts lead to actions - we can be encouraged to apply that to acquiring virtue rather than material objects.

We need to take note of this. Whatever mental intention we have can be achieved when we carry out the corresponding verbal or physical actions. However, if we have the intention but we don't carry it out verbally or physically, then we cannot achieve what we want. It just remains a wish or a thought. Sometimes we may feel discouraged by thinking that we have an intention or a wish but we cannot possibly carry it out. The only thing that holds us back is not putting more effort into the verbal and physical actions. The main point is that if our physical and verbal actions are preceded by good intentions in our mind, then we can definitely achieve the good qualities that we wish to have. When we have good intentions in our mind that are gradually applied to our verbal and physical actions, then everything is possible.

A simple example is a bird attempting to make a nest. It is clear that whatever conscious level it may have, there is an intention to make a nest. Because of this intention, it starts to pick up twigs and put them together. So when we observe a bird making a nest we notice that the bird flies out, picks up one individual twig, brings it back and

places it in place and goes back for another and so forth. In this way, eventually a nest is completed in order to lay eggs and to care for and nurture its young. We can learn a lot from that example. In comparison with the bird, we have much more conducive conditions in terms of intelligence. We as humans naturally have much greater intelligence, and due to our intelligence we also have lot of other resources to help us to acquire and achieve things. We are far more superior to a bird, so we can think that if a bird can achieve something out of hard work and eventually can achieve a goal, such as making nest, then we can definitely achieve what we want. The main point is that if we do not give up our good intention and we can carry it out, then we can slowly but surely be able to achieve our goals. The key point to stress is that we need to have a relaxed mind to prevent us from being hasty. The moment we become speedy and try to achieve something quickly, then that's where things may go wrong. If we take a more gradual approach, we can definitely achieve our goals.

The examples of the activities of the bird can be very inspiring. I recall in my home town in Tibet, there is a particular type of bird; it is quite small, not really a parrot but it has a similar shape to a parrot. It is a bird that comes to our area in summer and then flies back somewhere in the winter. So in the summer when it first comes to our area, it starts to build a nest. This particular bird's method of building a nest is to make small mud balls and attaching them to something. It picks up one piece of mud ball and puts it in place, and then makes another one and puts it in place. The bird slowly works on the nest and finally has a nice, strong nest. The nest is there in the summer and before the bird flies away in the winter, it closes the opening of the nest so when it comes back next summer it already has a nest. It also seems to know exactly its own nest. The nest is really high tech in design with the small mud balls. When they are stuck together and it dries up, the nest becomes strong, it holds together very well. We can see how intelligent a small creature such as a bird is, and having completed a nest, the bird makes it very secure to protect itself from other predators.

If we make an effort to meditate, this will definitely transform a distracted mind into a less distracted mind. Meditation will continue to stabilise the mind and that will make the mind clear and sharp. We can definitely achieve this stability and clarity of mind if we make an effort. When we apply the technique, a distracted mind firstly becomes focused, then stable, and finally clear. This contributes to having a calmer and more peaceful mind.

The three stages of development in our state of mind that lead towards a more calm and peaceful mind are that a distracted mind becomes focused, then stable, then clear. So how does meditation help us to achieve a focused mind? How does it transform a distracted mind into a focused mind? And how does meditation further allow a focused mind to become a stable mind and help us to achieve a clear state of mind? When we observe our state of mind in meditation, we find that, first of all, it is very difficult for us to focus. And when we do achieve some level of focus, it is hard to maintain it, and then even if we

were able to maintain it for a short time, it is hard to have a clear image of the object that we intend to focus on. So we need to look into what causes our mind to lack focus and lack stability and clarity. It all comes down to the one reason - our mind is influenced by distractions. Our mind has the habit of constantly being distracted by external stimulus. Even when we do achieve some focus, it is these distractions that lead our mind away from being focussed, because we start thinking about different things - everything else except the object we want to focus on. This leads our mind astray and prevents us from achieving clarity in the mind.

Why do we go after and allow ourselves to follow these distractions? First of all, in our ordinary state of being, our situation is such that our mind is influenced by our delusions. Because our mind is influenced by delusions, this initially leads us to follow all the distractions. We need to reverse that situation. This means we need to be completely mindful, particularly during our meditation session, to find the proper meditation technique. First of all, we need to be aware that our mind is naturally influenced by our delusions, so we need to completely withdraw our mind from the object that causes delusions to arise in our mind.

We do this by bringing our mind inward and choosing on an inner object to focus on. In this way, we begin to transform on all three levels. First of all, a completely distracted mind is brought within so it becomes more focused, and then as we place our attention upon the inner object our focus becomes more stable. If we apply this meditation technique more regularly, then we will begin to notice that our focus on the object starts to become clearer. This is how the technique begins to work. But it is only by repeated and regular attempts that we can reach that state. The key point of the technique is to maintain a continuous practice, so we need to try to develop a regular meditation practice in our life. As we become more familiar with focusing on the object, that familiarity in itself allows the mind to become more stable and clear. So even if we meditate for a short time, try to make it a regular practice.

Let us now adopt the meditation posture. Sit in a comfortable upright posture. Completely withdraw our attention or focus from all objects of distraction, and then bring our focus inwards, completely inwards within us. The inner object that we choose to focus on for our meditation session now is our own breath. Focus on the natural rhythm of your breath, the in flow and out flow of the breath; take an image of that breath and focus entirely upon that. In order for us to anchor our mind on the breath, it helps to count the breath. The main thing is to entirely focus on the breath itself. For the next few minutes we will adopt that technique.

[Pause for meditation]

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

4.2.2.1.2.2.4.2.2. The type of path one cultivates to overturn cyclic existence

4.2.2.1.2.2.4.2.2.1. Making the link now that we have identified the path

Following from the topic outline that we have, the main subdivision or category that we are referring to now is the second subdivision of an earlier category called the type of path we cultivate to overturn cyclic existence. That is further subdivided into three, 1) making the link now that we have identified the path, 2) the other precepts which will be explained later, and 3) in particular the way to train in ethics. So within these three subdivisions we are referring to, the first, which is making the link having identified the path. This link is referred to as the path or the practices that are to be adopted basically, the three higher trainings of morality, concentration and wisdom.

Last week we gave the definition of each of these trainings. We also distinguished the general training of ethics versus the higher training of ethics, the distinction between general concentration and higher concentration, and the higher training of concentration, as well as distinguishing between general wisdom and the higher training of wisdom. These three higher trainings are the means to achieve liberation. That means in order to achieve liberation we need to engage in these three higher trainings. In order to subdue our mind from delusions, we need to engage in the practice of three higher trainings. Initially the practice of ethics will help to make a distracted mind become less distracted. And then, with the training of concentration, our unfocused mind will be more focused and stable. With the training of wisdom, our unliberated state of mind will be free from a fabricated state of mind. Engaging in these three higher trainings will fulfil a trainee's goal.

It is good to question 'how does moral ethics help us refrain from distraction?' To explain how observing ethics is an aid to prevent ourselves from a distracted mind, first of all what causes a distraction is the very gross level of our superstitious thoughts and the delusions that arise in our mind. When we give in to these gross levels of superstitions or delusions, then this causes the mind to become agitated and distracted. For example, in relation to form, when we see a beautiful form we become attached to it. If we act upon that attachment then the mind becomes agitated.

Likewise, if we see an unattractive object, an object that we dislike, then if we allow our mind to be influenced by the negative attributes of that object, then anger can arise in our mind and that further causes agitation in our mind. In both cases, we are giving in to the influences of either attachment or anger in relation a beautiful object or an object that we dislike. When we stop engaging with that object, if we have the intention of refraining from engaging with an object that we are attached to or that we dislike, then this is called morality or ethics. When we consciously develop an intention to refrain from this engagement, then that is called morality.

Observing morality calms our mind; it settles the mind down. This is how ethics helps us to be less distracted. When we consciously decide to observe ethics or keep

morality, then this allows the very gross level of distractions or superstitious mind to withdraw, and allow our mind to maintain its focus inwards. For someone who observes morality well, it is possible to meditate well. If we do not observe morality well then it is difficult to have a focused meditation.

When we first make the attempt to withdraw our mind from the gross level of external distraction and bring our focus inwards, then what can hinder us in maintain our focus are internal distractions. There are gross and subtle levels of inner distractions. The gross level of inner distraction is also referred to as laxity and excitement, which are the inner obstacles or hindrances for us to be able to focus well. As we develop concentration, the concentration itself becomes the antidote for overcoming what is called laxity and excitement.

In relation to the three higher trainings, concentration is the particular training of overcoming the inner distractions of laxity and excitement. The earlier mentioned inner distractions of laxity and excitement are referred to the gross level of inner distractions. The subtle inner distraction is the grasping at the self. Grasping at the self is the subtlest level of inner distraction. The antidote for overcoming grasping to the self is wisdom, particularly the wisdom realising selflessness. So, this how the three higher trainings are the means to subdue the mind.

The text we are covering here is called the medium stages to enlightenment, or the middle Lam Rim. It does not give more extensive explanations other than an introduction to how the three higher trainings are an aid to subdue the mind. Whereas the extensive *Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, or great Lam Rim has more extensive explanations. Those who want to study further on this can refer to the extensive Lam Rim text and try to find out more to understand the subject in depth.

We will now look further into ethics - in relation to the quote from *Letter to a Friend* by Nagarjuna. What is good to note here, is in relation to the explanations given in the teachings, is that although we find that the subject matter is not too hard to understand, and not really complex, we still need to implement it in our practice. That is essential.

What needs to be understood in relation to the three higher trainings, is that they serve as a method to achieve liberation. The three higher trainings need to be accompanied by a state of mind called 'renunciation'. When the three higher trainings are accompanied by renunciation, then the training of morality or ethics and the training of concentration and wisdom become the actual means to achieve liberation. The main reason why the trainings are referred to as 'higher' particularly relates to being accompanied with refuge. What makes them higher is refuge. We need to understand that when the higher training is accompanied with refuge as well as renunciation, then it becomes the unmistakable method for obtaining liberation.

What we need to take note of here in relation to our own personal practice, is that in relation to the three higher trainings, even though it might be difficult for us at the moment to attempt to train and apply the higher training of concentration and wisdom immediately, we need to do

what we can manage. We do however have the capacity to train in ethics right now to live our life in conjunction with the training of higher ethics. This is something that we can definitely apply to our life. For that reason, it is essential for us to know what kind of ethics and how to practice it in our life.

To emphasise the attitude that we should try to maintain in our life in relation to the practice - we need to really remind ourselves again and again about the importance of cultivating a kind attitude or a kind mind. And based on our determination to develop a kind attitude, we need to try not to be influenced by minor incidents that cause turmoil in our mind. We need to try to overcome situations where we normally find ourselves being irritated, even with the slightest thing such as the slightest mishap causing anger in our mind; or observing a comparatively insignificant object that causes attachment to arise in our mind; or when we observe someone else's status, wealth or knowledge and we feel jealousy arising in our mind. If we give in to these states of mind - anger, jealousy and attachment, and in relation to very minor things, if we just allow ourselves to be habituated with being short tempered with even the slightest mishap, then that robs us from a sense of joy and happiness in our mind, as we are constantly in an agitated state of mind. This is not desirable for us or the people surrounding us. It has no benefit for either. We need to try to overcome that situation by trying to become less familiar with these negative states of mind, and form a less habitual angry response.

Before we conclude for the evening, we will spend a few minutes in contemplation or meditation. We will use the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra as the object to focus on. When the mantra has been recited, we can spend a few more minutes just observing and being completely in tune with the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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